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FOR

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LONDON SOCIETY.

JANUARY, 1888.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER IX.

WELCOMING THE STRANGER.

OF the natural stiffness of county gentlemen, their reserve towards strangers, their curious reluctance to make fresh acquaintances, their distrust of every one who is not at least the friend of a friend, a scion of the aristocracy, or furnished with undeniable credentials Bob knew absolutely nothing. Cliques and coteries were to him empty, meaningless words.

Where he came from, such nice distinctions had not yet been introduced.

He had a kind of an idea that people who went out hunting were all "hail fellow, well met; the sport united them in bonds of sympathy and companionship; the farmer was as good as the lord, the tradesman as the farmer. At least, such were Bob's notions.

They showed how ignorant he was, and how extremely little he knew of the Morbey Anstead Hunt. Democratic views were sternly suppressed by that self-approving body of gentlemen known as the Mutual Adorationites.

When Bob reached the end of the village, he found the cottages widened out on either side in order to inclose a small triangular-shaped common of about two acres in extent. Here, of a summer's evening, the lads assembled in great force, pitched their wickets and enjoyed a good game of cricket.

Just now, the point of attraction proved to be a neat little whitewashed inn, over whose door hung a large and brilliantly painted signpost. Its yard was full of horses standing champing at their bits, or stamping restlessly as the groom in attendance tightened up the girths, preparatory to the mounting of his

master or mistress. The hounds had already arrived and were congregated on the grass, some rolling, some playing, some placidly waving their fine-pointed sterns to and fro.

Burnett stood in their midst, mounted on a powerful, blood-like brown gelding, whilst the first whip occasionally made the lash of his hunting crop crack with a resounding noise, when an inquisitive hound, more excitable and less obedient than his comrades, ventured outside the circle.

The old ones, who knew what they had come out for, were mostly sensible enough, but now and again, a youthful member of the establishment, possessing an active canine mind, would exhibit a propensity to make acquaintance with horses' legs, or sniff suspiciously at the knots of little sturdy boys and girls who stood watching the proceedings, half in fear, half in delight.

Then the thong descended on the offender's hind quarters, and sent him yelping back from whence he came, smarting under a sense of injury. Bob pulled up his horse, and watched these and similar incidents with keen interest. Nothing escaped him. He noticed the sleekness of the hounds' coats, and what an admirably matched lot they were. He looked down into the depths of their honest, wistful eyes, that appeared now yellow, now brown, now luminously red, according to how the sunlight fell upon them.

Mongrels he had seen by the score, but never such hounds as these. It was a delight to watch them; each movement betrayed high pedigree. One sedate and curiously marked fellow particularly took his fancy. He was a very light hound, almost white, save for a few patches of tan, and he lay on the grass, as if determined not to distress himself until necessary, with his noble head reposing contentedly on outstretched paws, stained to a dark hue by the muddy roads along which he had travelled.

"Is that a good hound?" asked Bob of one of the whips.

"The best killer in the pack, sir. He comes from Lord Lonsdale."

And now people began to arrive from every quarter. The little common was dotted over with red coats, thrown up by a sprinkling of black. The sun shone out, and made the brass buttons twinkle like miniature stars; it cast a sheen on the horses' smooth coats, bringing their strong muscles into high relief, and lighting up the whole stirring and varied scene with its clear, genial rays. Overhead was a soft blue sky, across whose broad expanse of tender azure floated a few gossamer clouds, misty and white, their snowy purity contrasting vividly with the distant ether.

Bob—who was naturally observant—thought that, taking it altogether, he had never looked upon so goodly a sight.

He no longer wondered at the pride and enthusiasm Englishmen displayed when talking of fox-hunting. He could fully sympathize with their feelings.

For even as he gazed at the bright array, a glow of exultation thrilled his veins. In fact, he was so absorbed by all he now saw for the first time, that he did not notice a small group of well-mounted, well-appointed men who had drawn near and were evidently criticizing the new-comer's appearance.

Perhaps it was just as well that he escaped seeing the smiles of mingled indignation and contempt which disfigured their countenances, as they stood there and took stock of their fellow-creature.

Luckily for Bob, it did not enter his head to imagine that he was furnishing subject of amusement. To tell the truth, he had clean forgotten all about those unfortunate elastic straps. The excitement of the moment had chased their memory away.

Besides, he also was engaged in making mental observations, and had already taken a rapid survey of the assembled field.

Some few elegant sportsmen he marked down in his mind's tablet as "real swagger chaps, regular out-and-out swells." Needless to say these were the Mutual Adorationites. Others, again, appeared to be good fellows, without an atom of "side."

Yet, curiously enough, Bob's instinctive desire was to make acquaintance with the former rather than with the latter class. Chiefly because these extra-refined individuals were rarities in his Colonial life, hitherto seldom met with; and also because he had a notion they possessed a certain amount of originality and constituted a type altogether novel in his experiences. Perhaps, too, some inward consciousness whispered that they belonged to an entirely different order—the order to which, by his uncle's death, he ought now to aspire. No doubt they could teach him manners. For manners, above all, were what humble-minded Bob told himself he was sadly deficient in. His heart might be good, his sentiments irreproachable, but what was the use of that without fine old British polish? He was determined to lose no opportunity of acquiring it.

Meantime, Lord Littelbrane gave the signal for a move to be made, and hounds were at once trotted off at a brisk pace to draw Neverblank Covert, whose name was suggestive of the good sport it invariably afforded.

It lay on the slope of a hill, removed from roads and railways, and was situated in a scantily populated portion of the county. The strong, healthy gorse of which it was composed afforded a retreat dear to the vulpine race; and dire was the disappointment if by any chance Neverblank failed to furnish a fox when called upon. As a rule, the chief difficulty consisted in dislodging the quarry; for owing to the stoutness of the gorse, it was by no means an easy covert for hounds to draw.

But to-day they were fresh and eager, and in their ardour heeded not the stabs inflicted on their fine skins by the sharp-

pointed prickles. By the end of five minutes no less than three foxes were viewed stealing across the rides.

"Hoick, my beauties. Hoick, hoick at 'em," called out Burnett encouragingly, in a mellow, resonant voice that could be heard from afar.

Nevertheless, a considerable delay occurred, during which our friend Bob was on the tip-toe of expectation.

Once three or four young hounds appeared for a few minutes, and gave chase to a startled hare. Bob immediately joined in the pursuit, but to his intense disappointment, up rode the first whip and administered to the offenders such a punishment that they were only too glad to effect a retreat, their sense of guilt weighing heavily upon them.

As for Bob, not being a hound, he was castigated by the human tongue instead of by the lash. To his consternation, he suddenly found himself addressed by a stout, white-headed, red-faced, choleric-looking old gentleman, who at that moment bore a curious resemblance to an infuriated turkey-cock, thanks to the wobbling muscles of his purple throat.

"God d——n it, sir! Where the devil are you going to?" he roared out at the top of his voice, glaring fiercely at Bob with his small glittering eyes.

"I thought we were going to have a run," answered the young man apologetically.

"The deuce you did, and pray," blankety, blankety, blank—the reader's ear must not be offended by too faithful a repetition of the general's language—"what the dickens do you mean by encouraging Lord Littelbrane's hounds to run riot? Eh! answer me that question." And once more his flabby, pendulous throat became convulsed.

"I didn't intend to do anything wrong or against the rules," said Bob meekly. "But I fancied we were off."

"Off! indeed. You seem to possess a lively fancy, sir; rather too lively when combined with so *very*," he laid a sneering emphasis on the word, "small a knowledge of hunting. But you've made a mistake, let me tell you. The Morbey Anstead don't go in for teaching beginners how to hunt. You had far better try some other pack, for *we*"—oh! the importance, the majesty and superiority contained in that word—"expect people to behave themselves when they come out with us."

This speech angered Bob not a little; still with an effort he stifled his wrath. He had no wish to enter into a quarrel, but more especially did he dislike squabbling with a man so many years his senior. He determined to try the effect of a soft answer.

"I beg pardon," he said quietly but firmly. "I had no idea that I had committed so gross a breach of etiquette as, according to you, I unfortunately appear to have done."

But General Prosieboy was not one to be easily appeased. After the conversation which had taken place between himself and Lord Littelbrane he felt as if his personal honour were at stake, and that he was bound not only as a gentleman, but also as a M.A., to crush Bob down to the very ground. If his opponent had flown into a temper he would have been more at ease. The young man's humble, yet at the same time manly manner was just a trifle disconcerting. He must not let his rage evaporate.

"Damnation, sir," he retorted irately. "*You* had no idea, indeed! Pray what excuse is that? None, none whatever. It cannot be permitted that you should ruin our hounds and spoil our day's sport. People have no right to come out hunting with a pack like the Morbey Anstead when they don't even know the difference between a fox and a hare."

Bob reddened. The speaker's manner was so intentionally offensive that he realized at last that this foul-tongued old gentleman was deliberately setting to work to insult him. He was a high-spirited young fellow, and having once arrived at this conclusion, no longer made any effort to conceal his indignation.

"Will you be good enough to tell me who you are and what your name is?" he inquired with considerable heat.

Blankety—blank. "What's that to you?" replied the general.

"A great deal. I wish to know if you are authorized to keep the Field in order, and for what purpose you disgrace yourself by using bad language."

"Damn it, sir. Do you mean to tell me that you question my authority and wish to know my name?"

"You have guessed my desire correctly."

"By gad! sir, I'm not ashamed of it," returned the other excitedly. "It's Prosieboy, General Prosieboy."

"A very applicable name, no doubt," said Bob with a sarcasm he could not refrain from.

"And as for my authority," continued the general, treating this remark with the contempt it deserved, and inflating himself like a balloon filled full of pride instead of gas, "you need be under no apprehension about *that*. I am Lord Littelbrane's most intimate friend, and every action of mine invariably meets with his concurrence."

On such an occasion, when he was fighting the battles of the whole sacred body of Mutual Adorationites, General Prosieboy's conscience told him that it was a gallant and virtuous thing to draw the long bow. The young man had to be suppressed and squashed. At present he showed no signs of submission.

"I presume then," said Bob, with a twinkle in his eye, for General Prosieboy's grandiose manner had an irresistibly comic effect upon him, "that his lordship is by no means particular with whom he associates and has not an easily-offended ear."

And so saying Bob galloped off at full speed, for a loud "gane

forrard awa-ay" rang through the air, repeating itself in many sounding echoes.

This time the fox really took to his heels, and he, Bob, had not a moment to lose.

General Prosieboy stood for a second and looked after him. Then he shook his head doubtingly.

"He ought to be settled—he ought to be settled," he muttered three or four times over in tones full of anxiety and dissatisfaction. "And yet ——" with an oath, "I'm not sure that he is. Mr. Robert P. Jarrett is just about as tough a customer as I've come across for a long time. However, if he feels inclined to show fight I'll have another shy at him by-and-by." Whereupon he clapped spurs to his horse and rode off for the nearest road.

CHAPTER X.

CUTTING THEM ALL DOWN.

"WELL I'm blowed," said Bob to himself, as The Swell glided over the pastures with his long, smooth stride. "That old cove's boots and breeches were perfection, and yet I wonder if he is a specimen of the sporting gentleman. If so, they must be an uncommonly queer lot."

But General Prosieboy soon vanished from his thoughts, for the hounds were straight ahead, running hard and mute, whilst the Field were already split up into half-a-dozen different divisions. The Swell, too, was pulling like one not accustomed to the indignity of seeing many of his own species in advance of him. Bob let him go, being also anxious to get to the front as quickly as possible.

Although, thanks to his recent encounter, he had not been particularly fortunate in securing a start, he soon made the pleasing discovery that, owing to the extraordinary speed of his horse, he was only cantering when others were galloping, and before very long he succeeded in joining the leading horsemen.

This position contented him, and he resolved if possible to maintain it. As before stated, he was accustomed to riding, and what he wanted in judgment he made up for in "pluck" and dash. Although The Swell missed the delicate handling—the artistic lengthening and shortening of the reins to which he had grown accustomed when carrying his late master—he quickly ascertained that his present one was not to be denied. The good hunter's desire was to be where he could see the hounds. Bob's wishes were identical, and as he had the sense to leave The Swell pretty well alone at his fences, they got on better than might have been expected.

They had already flown some six or seven obstacles and had es-

established a friendly communication. Bob's spirits rose almost to the ecstatic pitch. His heart beat fast. Through his veins ran a warm glow that pervaded his whole frame and rendered him, for the time being, insensible to danger. Up to this point the fencing had been comparatively easy. But now they came to a narrow gap, blocked entirely by a huge fallen tree.

The leaders pulled up and looked at it dubiously. Somebody even suggested dismounting and trying to force the stubborn branches aside. Bob laughed in his sleeve. This was the species of jump with which he was most familiarized. That bare, slippery surface, with its spreading stems standing between four and five feet into the air, had no terrors for him.

He gave The Swell a touch of the spurs. No, to be correct, it was more than a touch. He intended the application to be of the gentlest possible nature, but somehow or other the rowels remained fixed in the animal's sides—and the next moment they were over, though not without a scramble.

Still, he had shown these hard-riding Morbey Anstead gentlemen that the thing was possible to jump, and before many seconds had gone by he was joined by Burnett. At length, after the obstacle had been considerably diminished, several other Nimrods hardened their hearts, whilst the timid went off in search of a gate.

Lord Littelbrane was one of those who had viewed Bob's performance.

"He's a deuce of a fellow to ride, that nephew of Straightem's," he observed to General Prosieboy, as the road division joined them. "A deuce of a fellow, though he knows nothing whatever about it."

"I'll tell you what he can do as well," said the general with venomous animation.

"What's that?" inquired his lordship apprehensively.

"Talk. He'd talk a dog's hind leg off. Take my advice, my lord, and don't give him the chance of getting in a word."

"I don't mean to."

"That's right. I had a tussle with him this morning, and he's simply impossible. Much more so even than I thought."

"Did you give it to him, Squasher?"

"I did," responded the general grimly. "But he's not had enough yet. He is one of those gentlemen who requires a second dose."

"One is enough as a rule, is it not?" said his lordship, with a faint smile.

"It is, but I shall take care to make number two a very great many degrees stronger."

Meanwhile, Bob was superlatively happy. Every yard that the fox continued running he became increasingly alive to the merits of the animal he bestrode. No wonder, then, he was pleased,

for it takes such a combination of qualities to make a good hunter. A single one goes for so little. The fencing is of no use without the speed, or the speed without the staying, and even then, bad manners will often destroy the whole. In short, a horse who possesses every desideratum is almost as hard to find as a pretty woman destitute of vanity, or an ugly one who is not soured.

Fence after fence The Swell threw behind him without a mistake. There are few sensations more delightful than bearing down on a good big obstacle, finding your horse come at it exactly in his stride, and feeling by intuition before he takes off that you are safe to get over well.

The Swell was fresh and in an extra good humour. So far, nothing had occurred to put him out. The ditches were dry and no gleam of obnoxious water offended his eye. Bob's confidence increased momentarily.

Thirty glorious minutes—minutes full of concentrated enjoyment—had elapsed since the fox broke covert. But the pace had burst him, and he now held out signals of distress. Burnett's sharp eyes spied him stealing wearily down a hedge-row, carrying his brush low and his head outstretched, yet with every faculty intent on making his escape.

But how to get into the same field?

The fence that surrounded it was absolutely unjumpable. It consisted of a huge bullfinch, black as Erebus, some eight or ten feet in height and bordered on either side by a stiff ox rail.

The boldest Nimrod present recognized that it would be sheer lunacy to attempt such an obstacle. There was but one means of ingress, namely, through a five-barred gate, but this proved to be securely chained and padlocked. With the smallest possible delay a couple of horsemen dismounted and endeavoured to take the gate off its hinges. No, it would not yield an inch. The assembled group were done. They stood looking at the timber barrier in dismay, whilst hounds burst into a bloodthirsty chorus and raced across the green sward. Burnett cursed the fate that had mounted him on a horse bad at rails. He hesitated and his companions hesitated too. Even in the far-famed Shires, a five-barred gate is a thing not often jumped, but it is done sometimes, and generally either by a well-known bruiser or else by a complete novice.

There was one novice present who felt desperate, and who moreover was in a state of such intense physical ecstasy as rendered him impervious to fear.

"Make way," he called out excitedly. And then he rode resolutely at the gate.

For a brief second, The Swell did not seem altogether certain whether his rider were in earnest. The next, reassured by that subtle electric current which surely exists between man and horse

and speechlessly communicates to each, the other's intention, he cocked his small ears and gathered himself well together.

Then with a powerful twist of his hind quarters, he flung over the gate, just tapping it lightly with one hoof, and landed safely on the other side. It was both high and stiff, and Bob, conscious of the difficulty of the jump, cast a hasty backward glance to see who intended following in his wake.

But nobody showed any disposition to emulate his example, especially as the leading hounds were already beginning to turn.

Lord Littelbrane watched Bob's performance in silence. If there was one thing he respected more than another it was courage; perhaps because he suspected a deficiency of that quality in his own nature, although nothing would have induced him to admit the fact. Something very like a tear gathered in his dull blue eyes.

He turned away, and as he did so, almost came into collision with General Prosieboy.

"Prosieboy," he said mournfully, "I have never felt the loss of poor, dear Harry so much as at this moment. We have nobody left to ride for us now."

"Why, my lord! What's the matter?"

"The matter!" he replied in tones of indescribable misery. "That terrible person"—a shudder went through his delicate frame—"that nephew of Harry's, has just jumped a five-barred gate and cut us all down."

"The devil he has! Well, I'm not surprised to hear it. He's mad enough for anything."

"Yes, but not another man dared follow. Even Burnett turned away."

"And quite right, too," said General Prosieboy, who was by no means an advocate of risking one's neck through the taking of hazardous leaps.

"It's a shameful thing to let this Colonial fellow take the shine out of all our best men," returned Lord Littelbrane. Then, with an unwonted burst of emotion, he added: "Oh! Harry, Harry, dear old man; this would never have happened had you still been in the land of the living. The glory of the Morbey Anstead has departed."

After clearing the five-barred gate as related, Bob experienced a few moments of triumphant elation; he leant forward and patted The Swell's bright, slender bay neck. But before many minutes his elation changed to dismay.

First, he was a little disconcerted at finding himself entirely alone. Second, he was not altogether certain how to proceed, and third, he perceived that the hounds had turned sharp back. The last circumstance was the most annoying of the three. For, as there was but one way into the field, so was there but one way out, and that the same.

Now it is one thing to charge a dangerous obstacle when the fury of the chase is upon you, when your blood is heated to almost fever pitch, and dozens of critical eyes are watching your performance; but it is a very different affair having to retrace your footsteps in solitude, perhaps doubting the wisdom of your action in the first instance. It is astonishing under such circumstances how much bigger the original leap looks.

As so often happens out hunting, it proved a case of the timid finding themselves better off than the brave. The former were now in the same field with the hounds.

Bob alone was separated from them. He glanced at the gate. There was no other possible mode of joining his companions. It looked horribly big, and to make matters worse, the take-off was now slightly up-hill, and indented by hoof-marks of cattle. He saw that he must not give himself time to think. If the thing were to be done at all, it must be done at once.

But perhaps what decided him was the sight of the noble master and his choleric old friend staring at him from their point of vantage with evident amusement.

He resolved to fall rather than let himself be laughed at by them, and sure enough, fall he did. The Swell made a gallant effort, but he tripped over some uneven ground just as he took off, and hitting the gate hard with both fore-legs, turned a complete somersault. Bob was a little shaken, but not really hurt, and soon recovered from the shock. He did not mind the disaster one bit; but what *did* get his monkey up, was seeing those two stuck-up, stand-off men close by never offer to give him the least assistance. He thought it downright ungentlemanly of them, and felt their conduct very keenly; especially as he overheard General Prosieboy say scoffingly:

"Ha, ha! Tried to show off once too often. Glad he found out his mistake."

The other nodded his colourless head, and then they rode away together.

But if the Mutual Adorationites were not kind, others were.

A jolly, good-natured farmer immediately rushed to the rescue, saying admiringly:

"Gad! sir. But that was a gallant jump of yours, and a real nasty one into the bargain; I hope you are none the worse for the roll?"

"Not the least, thank you," said Bob, beginning to recover from the annoyance occasioned by Lord Littelbrane's and General Prosieboy's conduct. "And fortunately the horse is not injured either. At least, as far as I can judge."

"Ah! That's lucky, for he's a good 'un. Many's the time I have seen the late Captain Straightem ride him to hounds."

"By-the-by," said Bob, "perhaps you can tell me who that

small, fair-haired, drab-faced man is, speaking to General Prosieboy."

The farmer looked in the direction indicated.

"That!" he said, as if astonished at his companion's ignorance. "Oh! that is Lord Littelbrane."

"I thought so," responded Bob. "What sort of a fellow is he?"

"That's rayther a difficult question for me to answer, sir, seeing as how I am one of his lordship's principal tenants."

But Bob had already discovered what he wanted to know from the man's manner.

"Never mind," he said; "I understand. If a question is difficult to answer, nine times out of ten it answers itself."

"You're uncommon sharp, sir," said his companion.

"Think so?" said Bob. "Not sharp enough, I am afraid, to pick up good manners from your English gentleman."

With which enigmatical remark, being now fairly mounted, he rode off to rejoin the hounds, who were already a couple of fields distant.

CHAPTER XI.

GENERAL PROSIEBOY COMES TO THE FRONT.

Bob urged The Swell to his speed and soon overtook the pack. He reached them in the nick of time, for this good, bold fox, finding himself sorely pressed, after dodging round some farm premises to regain his lost wind, once more faced the open, in hopes of gaining Amberside Hill, some two or three miles further on.

The gallant fellow put on a desperate spurt. He knew it was the last of which he was capable. The country was strong and thickly fenced. For another ten minutes the fun continued fast and furious.

As if anxious to wipe out the indignity of a fall, The Swell jumped brilliantly, and completely re-established the high opinion he had hitherto held in the estimation of his rider. Such glorious excitement soon made Bob forget his resentment against Lord Littelbrane and General Prosieboy. He felt on good terms with all mankind, himself and his horse in particular.

For the hounds were in full cry now, pursuing the failing quarry with wide-open jaws, red hanging tongues, gleaming eyes and upright bristles. Only one more field separated poor Pug from Amberside Hill. His foes were bent on pulling him down before he reached it. He was equally determined to baffle them. It meant life to him, only a mouthful of unsavoury food to them.

But though he toiled on gamely, he was now in full view, and the baying of the hounds and the yelling of his human enemies

served still further to terrify and dishearten him. He just managed to creep through the last fence dividing the road from Amberside Hill, and lay down panting in the ditch, where, hidden by dead brown leaves and yellow edish, his body was almost undiscernible. If by this ruse he could but gain a few moments, then he might steal into the covert, and seek the shelter of a friendly earth. His calculations proved correct, for one by one the eager hounds flashed over him and disappeared in the wood beyond.

Excited by the prospect of a near finish to so good a run, every horseman was on his mettle. They did not heed the stiff top-binder that ran through the fence, but charged it in a dozen different places.

Crash! crash! and two sportsmen bit the dust simultaneously, rolling over into the road, more forcibly than pleasantly.

Bob got over all right, and hearing the noise of falling bodies, turned to see who the unfortunates were. To his surprise, he perceived that the one nearest to him was no less a personage than General Prosieboy, who, inspired by the universal enthusiasm, had for once ventured on so formidable a leap.

He was a stout man and a heavy, and he did not fall easily. Few people do when they weigh over fifteen stone and have passed sixty years of age. For several seconds he lay immovable. Perhaps he was more frightened than hurt, but anyhow the sight of his white hairs mingling with the dust filled Bob with a sentiment of compassion.

"Good for evil," he said to himself; and in another minute he was off his horse and lifting the general from the ground. He wiped him clean, caught his hunter, and finally—when he had ascertained that no great damage had been inflicted—helped him to remount.

All this time General Prosieboy spoke not a word. He accepted the attentions bestowed as if they were his due. At last, he gathered up his reins and prepared to move on. At that moment, Bob, seized by a sudden desire for reconciliation, and also prompted by his good-natured Australian hospitality, looked up at the great M.A. with a pair of honest, pleading brown eyes, and said:

"Hullo! old chap. Don't you think you and I might just as well be friends?"

To do the general justice, taken by surprise, for one single moment he relented.

Perhaps Bob saw the softened expression of his face, for he continued in tones of greater confidence: "I'm all alone, and deuced dull I find it. We have not been formally introduced to each other, but what do you say to coming and taking 'pot luck' with me this evening at Straightem Court? Eh?" And as he spoke, he settled one of the general's gouty old feet in the stirrup.

But that gentleman, ashamed of his momentary weakness, and indignant with himself for having experienced it, had recovered from any temporary feeling of softness. He now considered it incumbent upon him to be doubly severe and repulsive in order to atone for the lapse of dignity, which owing to peculiar conditions, had unfortunately already taken place. He must not let the enemy see that there was any joint in his armour.

Consequently he drew himself up in his saddle, protruded his chest, and fixing his cold, gimlet-like eye on the audacious Bob, said in a solemnly frigid voice, as if his feelings were outraged beyond description:

"Young man, I make a point of *never* dining with persons whose acquaintance I have not had the pleasure of making in a proper and orthodox manner. The fact is, there are so many outsiders come to hunt with these hounds that it is impossible to be too particular. Under these circumstances I must decline the honour of taking 'pot luck' with one who is a complete stranger to me and likely to remain so."

So saying, and without uttering a single word of thanks for kindness received, he trotted off to a field close by, into which poor Reynard's body had been dragged, and was there undergoing the final obsequies. Despite every shift, his murderers had found him out.

Bob could only gaze after the general in speechless amazement.

"Darned old fool!" he exclaimed at last, with a burst of irrepressible wrath.

And yet there was something comic about the ancient warrior's behaviour too. It was so *very* VERY small, and displayed so lamentably narrow a mind. Angry as he felt at his insolence, Bob could hardly suppress a smile.

But how about these celebrated English manners, whose delicacy, refinement, and true politeness he had so often heard quoted at head-quarters? Were these them?

Why, out in the bush, if one man behaved to another man in so gross and insolent a fashion, no name would be considered bad enough for him. But then, on the other hand, the offer of a good dinner did not come as often over there as it did here. Perhaps that fact made all the difference.

But reason it out as he might, Bob had received a tremendous shock. All his preconceived notions had been subjected to severe disillusion, an operation which whenever it takes place always leaves a feeling of soreness and blankness behind.

He had been so humble and diffident, so ready to learn of all the Englishmen he came across, simply because they possessed the inestimable advantage of being Englishmen; and now he thought that he himself had more polish than they. He might be rough, blunt, outspoken, but he would have been ashamed to treat a

fellow-creature as Lord Littelbrane and General Prosieboy had treated him.

It took him much longer this time to recover from his disappointment and indignation, and during the process he did not attempt to speak to a soul; in fact, after his experiences of the morning, he laid it down as a rule, so long as he remained in England, not to address a single person until overtures had first been made to him. He would be on the safe side, at any rate, and not expose himself to any more insults and rebuffs. But circumstances defeated this intention, and prevented him from putting it into execution.

Whilst jogging on to get to the next covert, the whole Field had to pass through a series of nasty little, awkward bridle-gates, that flew to, almost as soon as they were opened. Bob, being mortal and a man, had before now noticed a very pretty, smart-looking, little woman, attired in a scarlet jacket, a white waistcoat, and a glossy hat, from beneath which her small coquettish face peeped out very alluringly. An incident now took place that shocked all his sense of chivalry. No less than three gentlemen in succession pushed by, and allowed one of these gates to slam upon this lady, thereby preventing her from getting through and hurting her hand as she stretched it out in self-defence.

The very sight made Bob indignant. There was something so currish and unmanly about the proceeding to his mind, especially when there was not even the excuse of hounds running hard. He darted forward, held the gate open, and although several other men availed themselves of his courtesy, insisted on the lady passing through before he relaxed his hold.

So natural did this action appear to him, that he was quite astonished to find her waiting for him on the other side.

"Thank you so much," she said in a clear, cheery voice. "It was awfully good of you letting me take your turn."

"Please don't mention such a trifle," he said in reply. "Anybody would have done it."

She shrugged her shoulders, and shot an inquiring glance in his direction.

"Are you well acquainted with the Morbey Anstead?"

"No, this is the first time I have been out with them."

Lady De Fochsey—for it was she—smiled, and leaning confidentially towards Bob, said:

"You are Mr. Jarrett, are you not, Captain Straightem's nephew?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"Never mind, perhaps I guessed. Tell me, are the ladies in your part of the world better treated than they are here?"

"From what I have seen in your case, I should say, most certainly," said Bob emphatically.

"Ah! don't waste your indignation. The Morbey Anstead females do not expect to be made a fuss with; if they are tolerated

it is all they can hope for. You see the men think such a tremendous lot of themselves, that it is impossible for them to think much of anybody else."

"So it appears," said Bob grimly. "You have hit it off exactly."

"Do you know," and she cast a side-long glance at him, "the highest compliment I have ever received from an M.A. was to be told, I was not in the way. Don't you think a woman ought to feel immensely flattered by such a speech? However well she may ride, however pretty she may be to look at, and nice to talk to, her highest reward is 'not in the way.'" And her ladyship burst into a little sarcastic laugh.

"Do you mean to tell me that such a saying is meant for praise?" asked Bob.

"Yes," she answered demurely, "from a Mutual Adorationite: very high praise."

"I don't quite understand the phrase; what does 'Mutual Adorationite' mean?"

"I won't explain, because it would take too long, and you so soon will find out for yourself. But to return to our sex. When gates out hunting are small, gentlemen in a hurry, ladies numerous, the latter go to the wall. They always do, all through life, for the simple reason that of all animals, man is the most animal, and the most selfish, woman the weakest, and the least protected."

"I am sorry you should think so badly of us," said Bob.

"I do not think badly of *you*," she replied, letting her limpid blue eyes rest full upon him. "You exerted your strength in my behalf."

To her surprise, he made no immediate answer. To tell the truth, he was a little taken aback. Being flattered by a pretty woman was a novel experience.

"What are you thinking about?" she inquired a trifle pettishly. "You seem as if you had not heard what I said."

"You must excuse my apparent inattention, Miss——" and Bob stopped short, for he had not an idea whether his companion, were wife, widow, or maid.

She laughed outright.

"No, I am not a miss, though you evidently seem to think that I ought to be one. My name is Lady De Fochsey." Then she looked at Bob, and told herself he was very well-favoured, and added softly, "widow of the late Sir Jonathan."

There could be no harm in letting him know that she was free to wed again, if so disposed. Besides, she liked young men. Old ones were so dreadfully prosy, and always *would* talk of themselves. There was a manly strength about Bob, combined with an honesty and good-humour of countenance, which she altogether approved of, even although his clothes were not exactly what they might be. But being a woman and he a man, she was inclined to regard this defect leniently, whereas if Bob had belonged to

the same sex as herself, every article of costume would have been severely criticized. But ladies are nearly always kinder to gentlemen than to other ladies, and *vice-versâ*.

"The fact is," said Bob explanatorily, "whilst you were speaking, I was guilty of the rudeness of making comparisons between your country and mine."

"May I ask with what result?"

"Certainly. I came to the conclusion that our men would go simply wild over a pretty woman," Lady De Fochsey smiled encouragingly, and Bob, surprised at his own hardihood, added, "like yourself, for instance. Whilst over here, from all accounts, she is not half appreciated at her true value."

"Oh, yes!" she said, with a twinkle in her eye. "We are appreciated after a certain brutal fashion, but not in the chivalrous, Homeric way, of which you seem a regular champion."

"Chivalrous! Homeric!" echoed Bob, a trifle puzzled. "I'm afraid I'm rather dull of comprehension."

"Very. Let me put my meaning clearer. Well, then, in Merry England, the pattern of philanthropy and civilization, we are regarded in one of two lights. Either we are pretty creatures, fattened and kept sleek at our lord's pleasure, or else we are beasts of burden, who have to do all the hard work, and get none of the credit; who screw and save at home, whilst *monsieur mon mari* cuts a figure in the world, and spends all the money on amusing himself. Oh, yes! I know." And she pouted her full lips in a provocative manner.

"No one could associate *you* with the beast of burden," said Bob, growing bolder as her ladyship became more gracious.

She laughed airily and changed the conversation.

"Come," she said, giving her horse a touch of her heel, "those tiresome hounds are nearly out of sight. We must be moving on."

Whereupon they put their respective steeds into a canter, but Lady De Fochsey's chestnut was completely outpaced by The Swell, and further conversation was therefore carried on under difficulties. Just then her ladyship spied Lord Littelbrane a little way ahead.

"Good-bye, for the present," she called out, "come and see me soon. Any one will tell you where I live. Your aboriginal ideas are as interesting to me as, it is to be hoped, my English ones are to you." And she waved the tip of her fingers.

Whereupon Bob rode on, considering he had had his dismissal, and consoling himself by thinking it really did not so much matter what the men were like, when the ladies were so very, very charming, and so entirely free from all stiffness and ceremony.

As for calling, of course he should call, and only too thankful for the chance.

She was undeniably pretty, although after the first flutter of excitement had passed, he told himself that, in spite of her ladyship's charms, she was not altogether "his style."

She wanted something. He was not quite sure what; but he fancied it was *soul*.

It was very pleasant, having agreeable things said to one, but then the pleasantness was in some degree diminished if you were not quite certain of the speaker's sincerity, and could imagine her making the same pretty little speeches to every man of her acquaintance. After the reception he had met with, it was extremely ungrateful of Bob to harbour such ideas, yet they occurred to his mind almost involuntarily.

Some inward voice seemed to warn him, that however much he might be captivated by Lady De Fochsey, he should never find in her the ideal woman, with whom some day he hoped to pass his life in perfect sympathy and community of spirit.

All the same, he was flattered by the notice she had taken of him. Besides, she was the first person, excepting Farmer Jackson, who had spoken to him in a frank and friendly fashion. She had lifted the sense of isolation that had gradually stolen over his spirit, and he felt more able now to put up with sneers and insults.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHARMING WOMAN.

LADY DE FOCHSEY had many admirers. Amongst their number it was not often she encountered one who had the keen insight to look beyond a pretty, superficial surface and seek to gauge the depths or shallows of her real character.

Hers was not an uncommon type of womanhood. A type that fluctuates between the good and the bad, and is continually being attracted and repulsed first by one, then the other. Stability is difficult to arrive at under such circumstances, and scarcely to be looked for. Without *will-power*, that much talked of thing, the human soul is but a poor vapid affair.

Lady De Fochsey was frivolous, and yet not conscious of her frivolity; artificial to a degree, but not purposely or intentionally so. Her nature was light, facile, variable, and, unfortunately for herself, it possessed certain dramatic instincts, which all through life made her seek for and delight in "situations." As an actress she might have made a reputation, since as a woman she never could refrain from acting. She meant no harm by it. It was only imagining the world a stage and she the player. Occasionally some of her parts fitted in very well. They *did* produce an effect. At other times they failed, and then of course the player was abused and called a "humbug," if not worse.

And yet, in the real sense of the word, Lady De Fochsey was not a humbug. She was true to the instincts implanted within her. That they were changeable, capricious, ever striving after sensation, was perhaps more her misfortune than her fault. It is not given to all women to be strong and simple, to see the follies of their sex, and as much as possible stand aloof from them. There must be butterflies, even if their pretty wings are frail and liable to be smirched and stained.

Lady De Fochsey's conversation was bright and by the majority all the more appreciated from the fact of its containing no depth whatever. With her pretty face and neat figure, few ever noticed if she floundered a bit whenever the more serious topics of the day were mentioned, or got hopelessly muddled if by any chance the sciences and ologies were touched upon.

What did it matter? Women were made to be amusing, not clever. Nobody wanted them to be cleverer than the men—it was only upsetting the long-established order of things, which worked so satisfactorily for the male portion of creation. It is so easy to starve another person's intellect and then say, "You are a fool," and so hard for the person thus treated to disprove the assertion. Many women now-a-days want a chance given them—a chance of enlarging their education and proving the real grit of which they are made. Lady De Fochsey had no such ambition. She would rather lead up to an emotional situation with a man, very human, very weak, and if a little erring so much the better, than aspire to the highest knowledge. She liked experimentalizing and finding out what chords and combinations could be wrung from the masculine nature.

About the female one she troubled herself very little, except in her own individual case.

She considered that her duty in the world was to smile graciously, make full use of her china-blue eyes, pay little insincere compliments and by so doing get herself talked about as "a charming woman."

This duty she fulfilled admirably, though it must be admitted she possessed more allies amongst the men than amongst the ladies.

Taken as a general rule, the hunting-field is not a sphere calculated to develop the exchange of many intellectual ideas. When pursuing the fox, her ladyship was in her element.

To have a train of young men, no matter how vapid they might be, always dangling about her habit-skirt, rendered her supremely happy. The more the happier. It was a delight to count them up; a real grief to find that one had escaped from his allegiance. She called them her "tame cats," and was perpetually getting up pretty little scenes with them, that would have been an ornament to any private theatricals. Act the first was invariably: "Charming woman—love at first sight." Act the second—"Quarrel.

Charming woman misunderstood." Act the third—"Grand reconciliation. Charming woman more charming than ever." Sometimes, however, but never when she could help it, there was a fourth act—"Break away of captive, charming woman in despair—confounded at hearing herself abused."

It is astonishing how many varieties this little play was capable of. The chief actor never seemed to tire, but derived fresh amusement from every rehearsal.

All were fish that came to Lady De Fochsey's net. She welcomed Bob as a new admirer, partly because she was already prepossessed in his favour by the episode of the gate, and partly owing to her own peculiar ideas of true love.

She was always in search of true love, yet curiously enough had never found it. When she had married the late Sir Jonathan, fat, red and wealthy, twenty years older than herself, she was persuaded the *grande passion* had come at last.

It hadn't.

Two years of matrimony completely did away with the illusion as far as the baronet was concerned. Query:—Would she have entertained it if he had not had twelve thousand a year?

When Sir Jonathan died, Lady De Fochsey did not weep her eyes out. After a decent interval—it was scarcely more—she recovered from her grief.

And now! behold the beautiful confidence of female nature. She was so romantic, so trustful and enthusiastic, that she firmly believed there was no reason, because one man had failed to answer her expectations, why another should do the same.

She had now been a widow for five years, was twenty-eight years of age, and began to feel a trifle disappointed with herself, for not having succeeded in falling in love.

She was puzzled why the *grande passion* did not arrive. She had done her best to foster it, by reading all sorts of novels of the ardent, consuming, soul-too-big-for-the-body type. If anything could have kindled the required spark such literature ought to have proved successful.

It helped a little, but only a little, for the provoking part of it was, that noble and high-flown as were the theories propounded, they did not work well when applied to practical life. There was always a hitch somewhere.

The Byronic young man with dark passionate eyes, hollow cheeks and wondrous magnetic power over all the women with whom he came in contact—the young man who cared nothing for material comforts, who disdained luxury, and did not even care for a good dinner, was not to be found now-a-days. The type was dying out, and every year became more scarce. Lady De Fochsey entertained a species of veneration for it; but even she could not help admitting, in her own secret consciousness, that living on romance and sentiment, and whimsical, high-flown words, might be an exceed-

ingly fine thing, yet when put to the actual proof, it was a still finer thing after a hard day's hunting, when you came home tired and wet, to find a nice warm room, a glowing fire and a *recherche* little repast awaiting you.

When she stretched herself out full-length on a sofa, attired in a captivating tea gown, and read one of the fashionable Spiritualistic novels on the mysteries of the occult world, astral planes, electric forces and so on, she never could quite determine in her own mind how much or how little of an impostor she was.

For she *did* like her comforts—especially when she could enjoy them in private. It was impossible to deny the fact, and what was worse, each year she seemed to like them better. But then on the other hand how exquisitely divine it must be for your amorous soul to have the power of making little celestial expeditions quite independent of its mundane body, and go flitting and flying about in search of the much-wished-for and sure-to-exist-somewhere kindred spirit.

There was something ecstatic, captivating and ennobling in the very idea.

And then the delight of the kindred spirit! The meeting, the joy, the embracing! It is to be feared that Lady De Fochsey's little head was often in a muddle. She accepted every new theory of the day, without understanding a single one.

The conflict going on between her body and her soul verged on the pathetic.

She could not make up her mind whether to throw in her lot with things heavenly or things earthly. They both had their fascinations, and the struggle was terrible.

When she found disappointment in the one, she had recourse to the other. But during the hunting season, terrestrial influences decidedly preponderated.

She could not help liking smart habits and nice clothes, nor could she refrain from a feeling of triumph when she reflected that her waist with a little squeezing only measured twenty inches round, and that she could tie a tie better than nine hunting men out of ten.

Such facts as these compensated for a good many minor disappointments.

Chief amongst the latter, had been the want of attention hitherto paid to her by Lord Littelbrane.

As a man, she did not care for him one bit, and moreover with that marvellous—what may fairly be called *husband*—instinct possessed by the sex, she knew that she never should.

He exhibited none of those points which attract a woman.

He was neither handsome, nor good company, nor miserable, nor mysterious, nor magnetically sympathetic. He was just Lord Littelbrane, with fifteen thousand a year, and if he had not been Lord Littelbrane, everybody would have said what a dull,

stupid, uninteresting little creature he was, and laughed at him for giving himself airs.

Although his lordship invariably bowed to Lady De Fochsey, and sometimes even went the length of making a remark about the weather, she was distinctly aware, that in spite of sundry small overtures on her side, she had failed to make any impression. Now this knowledge always irritates a woman, especially if she be young and pretty, and a flirt. The game may not repay the trouble, but if she can't play it to her mind, then she always hankers after it.

This was exactly Lady De Fochsey's case.

Besides, she considered it the "proper thing" to be hand-in-glove with the master, if only because he *was* the master. She could forgive his showing no civility to any of the other ladies, if he showed it to her. But to be treated exactly the same as the whole tribe of women who hunted with the Morbey Anstead hounds, women who had no pretensions to good looks, who had not an idea of "getting themselves up," who did not wear scarlet jackets and white waistcoats, and whose waists were as flat as pancakes, was exceedingly mortifying. Nay, not only mortifying, but incomprehensible. It went beyond her experience everywhere else. By much flattery and insensibility to downright rudeness, she had contrived to a certain extent to ingratiate herself with the Mutual Adorationites. They all condescended to speak to her, but the desire of her life was to get up a flirtation with Lord Littelbrane, if only for the fun of paying him out for having resisted her charms so long. For that he should have done so was in every way unaccountable. She wanted to see him incorporated among her "tame cats;" then wouldn't she lead him a pretty dance.

(*To be continued.*)

MISS BRADDON AT HOME.

A SKETCH AND AN INTERVIEW.

By JOSEPH HATTON.

THERE is no more popular name at the circulating libraries, no name more universally known among novel readers to-day, than that of Miss Braddon. "Lady Audley's Secret" was the first of her three-volume stories. It now heads a list of forty-seven novels, all of which have held their own in the competition of the time.

"Lady Audley," "Henry Dunbar," "Eleanor's Victory," "Aurora Floyd," "The Doctor's Wife," "The Trail of the Serpent," and down to the latest, "Mohawks," and "Like and Unlike," they represent a steady persistent march of honest, earnest work. If the result is unequal, from an artistic point of view, if there is a hiatus now and then which gives special prominence to her best known efforts in the pure realms of fiction, this is to say that she is on the same human level with eminent toilers in all branches of Art.

Dickens, I suspect, is one of the few writers who always worked up to the most enthusiastic height of his ambition. He always seems to have written at a white heat. He was always under the influence of an almost morbid sense of responsibility to the public; and when he wanted inspiration he turned back to his own work, and re-read himself. Miss Braddon is not one of those authors who consume themselves in their own fires, nor is she one of those plodders of the Trollope school, who write by the clock and turn out their copy with mechanical exactness. She has her workmanlike methods, but she also has her moods, and she has sufficient of the artistic temperament to carry her through her day's work without disregarding the pressure of inspiration, and at the same time without making herself a slave to it.

Miss Braddon is not only a novelist, she is a housekeeper; her controlling hand is seen and felt in the kitchen as well as in the drawing-room of Lichfield House, Richmond, where, with her husband, Mr. John Maxwell, for many years her publisher, she dispenses a hearty hospitality, and lives with her family a matron and a gracious hostess. Dickens, who was so tremendously enthusiastic about his books in his letters to friends, rarely spoke of them in conversation, and Miss Braddon is even still more reticent

about her work than Dickens was. She will talk shop with a fellow author, or criticism with a literary guest; but it will take both of them all their time to get her into conversation about her own books, her methods of work, or her opinions concerning the results of her labours. She will prefer to talk to you concerning some other author, or on the subject of theatres, travels, horses, or the progress of science. She is a fine horsewoman.

When, between her hours of work, she is not scouring the roads of the New Forest in the neighbourhood of Lyndhurst, you may meet her tearing along the pleasant drives of Richmond Park. She sits her favourite chestnut with the firmness and ease of an expert. Her love of horseflesh is an inheritance, it "comes by nature." Her father was the "Rough Robin" of the old *Sporting Magazine*, a clever rider, devoted to country habits and pursuits, and a native of Cornwall.

As a girl Miss Braddon was attracted both to the profession of literature and the stage. She acted in several country theatres, and at the same time wrote short stories and literary sketches, her first little books seeing the light through the press of a provincial publisher. She had written many trifles, both in the way of fiction and essay, before "Lady Audley." The story of that story is a romance in itself. Mr. Maxwell had started in more or less of rivalry to Dickens' first periodical a magazine called *Robin Goodfellow*. Dr. Mackay was its editor, and Lascelles Wraxall was his second in command. There had been some difficulty in regard to the opening novel, in consequence of which the new periodical was upon the eve of postponement, a serious *contretemps* in the face of its extensively-advertised date of publication. The day before a decision was necessary Miss Braddon heard of the difficulty and offered to write the story.

"But even if you were strong enough to fill the position," was the publisher's reply, "there is no time."

"How long could you give me?" asked the aspiring authoress.

"Until to-morrow morning."

"At what time to-morrow morning?"

"If the first instalment were on my breakfast table to-morrow morning," he replied, indicating by his tone and manner the utter impossibility of the thing, "it would be in time."

The next morning the publisher found upon his breakfast table the opening chapters of "Lady Audley's Secret."

Robin Goodfellow did not hit the public. It did not live to finish "Lady Audley." Maxwell lost money over it; but he discovered Miss Braddon, whose story took the town in its three-volume shape, and laid in the foundation of a lasting fame and prosperity.

Before "Interviewing" had become popular in this country I had called upon several distinguished persons in England for the literary and journalistic purposes of two great American publica-

tions. I only, however, undertook to make pen and ink sketches of ladies and gentlemen whom I knew. My work was literary more than journalistic, and I confess that it gave me pleasure. I selected my own subjects, and it is possible that there are biographers yet unborn who will thank me for my notes when I am long past caring whether they do or not. I commended interviewing under discreet editorial regulation to the English press in a series of papers in *Harper's Magazine*, and in a volume entitled "Journalistic London," as I had previously commended it in other directions. I was only a little before my time. Some of the most interesting of M. Blowitz's contributions to the *Times* have been interviews with eminent men and women. This is not an apology for interviewing, but an introduction to the following sketch, which the editor of this journal is good enough to believe will be of special interest to his readers.

A pleasant matron-like woman, Miss Braddon (Mrs. John Maxwell), above the medium height; fair, with a complexion that suggests more of horse exercise and the open air generally than pens and ink and hard work in a library. She has a broad, firm, compact forehead. Her eyes are small, and look a trifle tired; her mouth large and characteristic; firm lips, a strong chin. The expression of her face suggests an amiable temperament and a kindly nature; and, like all authors who are at work on an engrossing book, there is in her eyes an occasional suggestion of introspection, which means that their owner for the moment is thinking of her work, taxed unexpectedly with a sudden idea, or worried with the vagaries of one of the fictitious characters she has created and cannot altogether control.

"We have known each other twenty years," she said. "You were one of the contributors to the first number of *Belgravia*, and if you want to write about me I am sure you have material enough, without making a formal advance upon so poor a subject."

"But I want to interview you something in the fashion of a stranger, as if I did not know you, as if my editor had directed me to drive from London to Richmond for the express purpose."

"And do you do that kind of work when you are directed by your editor, as you say?" she asked smiling.

"When it pleases me and I know the lady or gentleman I am to call upon," I said.

"Ah, forgive me, I thought there was something of the aping of humility in the description of your mission," she said.

"But, seriously, I do wish to interview you, and in a business-like way, for the purpose of publication in America and in England."

"Very well, then," she replied, "I have never been interviewed yet, but I am willing after luncheon to submit to the ordeal, and in the meantime here comes Max, who will be glad to have a chat with you, while I give some household orders."

The gentleman familiarly spoken of as "Max" is Miss Brad-

don's husband—hale, hearty, breezy, in spite of his sixty odd years. A keen business man, newspaper proprietor, publisher, printer, he has been everything in connection with the journalistic history of Fleet Street. He had a hand in starting the *Standard*, and was for years the proprietor of the *Belgravia Magazine*; and he is known as well for his general hospitality as for his smart, clever business operations.

"Welcome! Glad to see you!" he says, and we sit down to talk over the events of the day, until I turn his thoughts into the channel that is most useful for this article. An inveterate collector of pictures and *bric-à-brac*, I have no difficulty in making him call my attention to some of his recent purchases. They include a David Cox, a Clarkson Stanfield, and two examples of Linnell.

It is a noble room in which we are talking—the drawing-room, with its three great bay windows. Two of the triple set of bays are filled with superb stained glass. Many rare works of art crowd the walls. There are cabinets here and there filled with *bric-à-brac*. Easy chairs, a grand piano, a harmonium make up the furnishing catalogue. But for the stranger guest there will be found a tableful of current books, publications and newspapers, and one day this week, sitting down in the glow of an autumn fire, we turned over together, host, hostess, and myself, "Frith's Biography," the first volume of "Darwin's Life," the current number of *Belgravia*, the *Fortnightly*, a new edition of "King Solomon's Mines," the *Telegraph* (containing its Friday's gossip), a *New York Tribune*, with the report of Irving's opening night in "Faust," a copy of "The Mistletoe Bough," and many other literary and journalistic works.

"Frith is delightful," said the hostess. "In one instance he tells too much, perhaps, for a certain great lady whose origin was humble. Some people don't like to be reminded of their plebeian birth; others seem to have a continual desire to talk about it. The worst of our profession is that one has not time to keep up one's current reading; or for keeping anywhere near the standard of a daily knowledge of events and opinions, it is impossible. I mean to finish 'Frith' and to read 'Darwin' at San Remo."

Lichfield House was originally built for the first Earl of Abergavenny. It afterwards became the palace of the Bishop of Lichfield, and hence its name, one of the bishops using it as his episcopal residence. The drawing-room has a curious history. Having been used for ecclesiastical examinations and for consecrating serious students to the service of the Church, it passed into the hands of Katalana, the famous vocalist, who, at the height of her popularity, gave receptions here. The house is in the style of Queen Anne. Sala says Sir Christopher Wren must have built it. The drawing-room is a picture-gallery, and indeed the house is decorated throughout with many fine

examples of the best English masters. In the breakfast-room, among other curiosities, is the little table used by the Duke of Wellington during the Peninsular war, and on which he wrote the despatch that recounted the victory of Waterloo. It is a curious table, so constructed that it is either a despatch-box, a card table, a chess table, a dining-table, or a writing desk.

"Sir William Hamilton Maxwell," says my host, "also wrote the tales of Waterloo on that table; but here is another thing I believe I have invested in and filled since you were here last."

He directed my attention to a magnificent bookcase, of English marqueterie work. Opening it, there was displayed a collection of large volumes handsomely bound in red morocco.

"The Braddon novels!" my host exclaimed, with undisguised pride; "the original manuscripts. It might be said one day that no one pen could have written so much and so well. Here is the answer."

"Show me the manuscript of 'Lady Audley's Secret,'" I said.

"The only one I do not possess; it was burnt in a fire at the publisher's office."

"And the truth is," said the author, who joined us at this moment, "Max did not think so much of my manuscripts in those days; I am sure it never occurred to me to take the trouble of preserving them; and luncheon is ready."

The dining-room at Lichfield House is a plain, comfortable apartment. The sideboard was in the famous Exhibition of 1851. The chairs were designed by Inigo Jones. The fireplace is a fine example of carving in black marble with its attendant "dogs." Pictures take the place of the customary overmantel. The walls everywhere, indeed, throughout the house seem to be crowded with paintings. Among those in the dining-room are a portrait of the hostess by Frith, a head by Tadema, a couple of landscapes by Nasmyth, a Ruysdael, a pair of Stansfields, several Gainsboroughs, and other notable works. One has met many a genial crowd under this mahogany, the hostess presiding, the conversation bright and general, the viands and the wine characteristic of old-fashioned hospitality.

However carefully Miss Braddon may paint in her novels the changing fashions of the day, the five o'clock teas in the hall, the elegant dinners *à la Russe*, the formal receptions, the midnight routs, the dainty frivolities of life *à la mode*, there is nothing of this kind of thing at Lichfield House. The management here is on the lines of the old school of hospitality. Formality disappears in the cordiality of welcome, and the feast is the feast of our grandfathers; it is not served *à la Russe*, but comes to table in the good old English way—is carved by host and hostess, by guests and friends, and there is even maintained the good old custom of "taking wine" between host and guest; the old habit

of "Mr. So-and-So will be glad to take wine with you," followed by the pleasant nod, the raised glass, and the frequent healing of an old breach in friendship, or the beginning of an agreeable new acquaintanceship.

Making a remark upon this subject, the hostess replies—"Yes, I am Conservative in my tastes, and if I am a politician, I am a Tory. I don't know to what extent I am a Tory on strict principles; but I am a Tory by birth and instincts—I love old things, old habits, old houses, old customs, old trees, old halls, old costumes."

I recall at the moment quite a family party that sat down to luncheon, a guest or two, and some young people. A *Times* leader writer, a yachtsman from Southampton, and an agent from the New Forest, where the Maxwells have recently built a superb country house, in which a week or two back Mr. Labouchere wrote almost an entire number of *Truth*. The conversation is general; it begins with the latest theatrical failure, the newest literary success, and ends with a discussion of the situation in Egypt and the bitter enmity of the French towards the English.

"What amazes me," said the yachtsman, "is our persistent toadyism of the French, when if England really wants a friend in Europe our natural ally is Germany."

"Don't you hate politics at dinner, when everybody is not in agreement upon the subject—all Tories or all Liberals?" asks the hostess, speaking *sotto voce* to her nearest neighbour.

"Yes; let us talk of books and plays."

But the yachtsman has found an opponent, and the debate became too interesting to be ignored; and so the luncheon passed off merrily, both Liberal and Conservative declaring at the finish that there was no material question of division between them, that they were both Englishmen first and partizans afterwards, and that all they desired was the maintenance of the honour of the country and the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

And at last we have ascended to the first floor, my hostess and myself, traversing an old wainscoted staircase and landing, and sitting down in a large, square room, with an outlook upon a long, trim George the First garden.

"This is my workshop," she says, "the usual sort of thing, I suppose, like your own, like all literary workshops; lots of books of reference, a somewhat disorderly desk. This block of shelves is full of French works. I bought, by-the-way, almost the whole of Tom Taylor's French library. Here is an American edition of Dickens, with the green covers of the original monthly parts of 'Pickwick.' Here are Scott, George Eliot, Lamb, Stael, a host of old comedies, the customary dictionaries, and so on."

We walk about the room as she talks, and I note the thorough business-like character of the place—plain, solid bookshelves, a desk that might have been made for a merchant's office, chairs for

ease and chairs for work, no piano, no guitar; a workshop, and at the same time a comfortable room, and with a bright, cheerful fire burning on a bright, cheerful hearth.

"These are very common-place books," says my hostess, taking from a shelf one of several small volumes. "I don't do anything in this way as systematically as our friend Sala, nor on the elaborate plan of poor Charles Reade."

She handed me a volume. It was full of carefully-written extracts from books and newspapers.

"Anything that strikes me very much during my reading I preserve in this way."

"Now tell me," I say, as we sit down by the fire, "something about your working day."

"My idea of a perfect and pleasant day," she says, "is to devote the whole of it to writing and reading; when I say the whole of it, I mean from breakfast at ten, say until dinner at seven, with intervals of strong tea, and sometimes a little luncheon. I can do this four days during the week and enjoy it, and get through a lot of work, if I have the other two for riding, and more especially for hunting."

"And your reading? Who are your favourite authors, as the new inquisitorial autograph books put it?"

"Well, I must confess that I have read very few of my contemporary novelists; I think I have read more French stories than English. I have read and am fond of George Eliot, Rhoda Broughton, Wilkie Collins, of course; and I know my Thackeray, my Dickens, and my Scott. I always say that I owe 'Lady Audley's Secret' to the 'Woman in White.' Wilkie Collins is assuredly my literary father. My admiration for 'The Woman in White' inspired me with the idea of 'Lady Audley' as a novel of construction and character. Previously my efforts had been in the didactic direction of Bulwer, long conversations, a great deal of sentiment; you know what I mean. I suppose every young writer starts with an ideal author; Bulwer was mine, and the late Lord Lytton took great interest in my work. He undertook to correct and criticize my first story, and from both him and his son, the present Lord Lytton, I have received many charming and valuable letters. The late Earl wrote me long criticisms of almost every book I wrote, not mere complimentary letters, but fault-finding letters, pointing out where he thought I was wrong, and—being very generous, of course—what he thought were good points in my work. I dedicated 'Lady Audley' to him. He was the first author of note to give me any real encouragement. I think I have no hesitation in saying that all round Dickens has given me more pleasure than any other writer. Charles Reade I admired greatly, both as a man and an author. I think he was one of the most powerful of our English writers, and what a world of tenderness of thought he brought into his work!"

"You are writing three novels for Leng and Co., of Sheffield?"

"Yes, to run over a period of three years."

"Can you tell me anything about them?"

"Would it be wise, do you think?"

"It is for you to say."

"I don't think it would," she replied. "You know, how having settled the plot of a novel, one frequently modifies it in the course of its development; how often characters themselves take the bit and run away with one. I might say something touching the story I am writing and then later on disappoint the reader."

"You are engaged upon the first novel for Mr. Leng at the present time?"

"Yes."

"Have you progressed far with it?"

"Yes; but the main work, and the hard work, has to be done, the harder because in the midst of it I am leaving England. In the end both the story and myself will benefit by the change. Max, myself, three of our boys, and one of our girls are going to winter at San Remo. We start to-morrow. We shall pause *en route* at Lucerne, then at Milan; and within the next ten days I hope we shall be settled down at San Remo until next May, when you must come to the Forest, and we will talk over our adventures."

There are packing boxes here and there about the room, and other evidences of what North country people call "fitting." There are little batches of the manuscript of the new novel, a few white chrysanthemums from Lyndhurst, whence the hostess had travelled the day previously, and we sat in the midst of books, boxes, manuscripts, flowers, labels "For San Remo," and other tokens of work and travel, and still found the occasion not incompatible for talking shop once the right themes were broached; and at an early date I shall hope to give you the result of what turned out to be an interesting conversation on "Novels and Novel-writers."

Meanwhile the stirrup cup is prepared in the dining-room; it is composed of choice whisky, with a slight modicum of lemon and a dash of boiling water. It is a defence against the sleet and fog outside, the precursor of the abnormal darkness which meets me later on in the outskirts of London, and from which my host and hostess are now flying by Continental express to the balmy atmosphere of the "sunny South."

MY POOR WIDOW.

By A. PRICE,

AUTHOR OF "WHO IS SYLVIA?" "A WILFUL YOUNG WOMAN," ETC., ETC.

"ONE poor widow was left alone, left alone, left alone," so chant discordantly a party of noisy little school-children circling round the disconsolate individual alluded to, represented in the present case by a fat little maid of six, and then they proceed to offer advice as to choosing a partner "that she loves best," which she promptly acts on by seizing a small reluctant boy of four and unblushingly saluting him in the midst of the assemblage.

"Summary settling of matters that," said the rector laughing at my elbow. "You wouldn't call it too true to nature though, would you?"

"Certainly not," say I; "our sex has not developed business aptitude to that extent, sir." And I fall thinking of "one poor widow," who found her solitude by no means so easily disposed of. More's the pity. Or *is* it a pity? Well, I don't know. Here is her story for others to decide on.

To begin with, my poor widow was rich—rich, beautiful and still young. For five years' peaceful retirement after her husband's death had preserved to her the freshness of almost girlhood, and at eight-and-twenty Hester Sullivan was distinctly the loveliest among many fair and youthful women gathered together at a ball, given to junior Royalty in one of our wealthiest mercantile ports.

I saw my heroine there for the first time, and heard the earlier chapters of her story. The rest I gathered later on. How, is of no consequence to any one.

Dressed in black, of some soft shining stuff, no colour about her except a cluster of deep red carnations in her square-cut bodice, no ornament but some tiny diamond stars in her dark, braided hair, she formed such a perfect picture as she sat a few yards from me listening to would-be partners though declining to dance, that I was fascinated into what a discreet companion called impertinent staring.

"She is delightful to look at, I acknowledge. Her head is perfectly imperial, is it not? But do leave off focusing her in that unblushing fashion, then you shall have an introduction presently."

"She can't possibly be as charming as she looks," said I mistrustfully.

"Oh, but she is," was the prompt response. "Put up your fan and turn away; I'll tell you all about her while this gallop goes on."

"She was the only child (by his first marriage) of a Doctor Boyce, a young man struggling into practice at Preston thirty years ago. Having very little money himself he married a wife with none at all. Times went against them; the poor woman died when Hester was a baby. He was faithful to her memory seven or eight years; then married again and in the next eight years had almost as many children in his nursery. He was never a man to get on. They were frightfully poor. A relative sent Hester to school till she was seventeen, then she came home to make number eleven in a household where there was not enough for half as many, and to crown all her father was seized with an illness which turned him prematurely old. That was the situation when Mr. Sullivan first saw Hester, and, ridiculous as it may sound, fell in love with her."

"Why ridiculous?"

"Why, because he was sixty years old, my dear! It's a fact, and yet when he made his offer to Doctor Boyce, the poor man, knowing what a Plutus he was ('Sullivan & Co.' one of our wealthiest firms), hadn't nerve to say no offhand, but actually turned the responsibility over to his child. Just fancy what hung on her decision: fabulous riches for herself, secure plenty out of her pin money alone for her entire family on the one hand; grinding poverty for the whole batch on the other."

"Without putting it coarsely Mr. Sullivan took care she should comprehend the contrast. He was really an agreeable man, young for his years, and pressed his suit with discrimination. 'Don't do it to be miserable,' said the stepmother feebly trying to be just. 'But it would give your dear father a new lease of life.' So Hester, who was heart and fancy free, said very quietly, 'Then of course I will say "yes" mamma,' and married her elderly wooer; and if there was no love's young dream in the business, they got on wonderfully well together for six years. They travelled a good deal, visited rarely, only among our upper ten when at home. She improved marvellously. I can't help fancying her husband grew jealous of the admiration she excited. Anyhow, when he died—she was only just twenty-three—he left her seven thousand a year so long as she remained unmarried; no longer. I call that last clause ungenerous, but Mrs. Sullivan never allows a hint at such an opinion in her hearing. She has an Eden of a place a mile or so out, and there she has rusticated and read and kept holiday house for her step-brothers and sisters, and been Lady Bountiful and so forth in an unadvertised fashion of her own, but she has never entered society till this evening. Now she comes

out of compliment to our mayoress whom some folk snub unmercifully. They are rather mushrooms, even in this city of *nouveaux riches*; but Mrs. Dobson is Hester's neighbour, and a very good soul indeed, so naturally the two women fraternize. His Royal Highness yonder has spent ten minutes talking to our widow. The men are elbowing one another for an introduction to her. That dark man stooping to speak to her now is Mr. Furness, the junior in 'Furness and Son,' people with their half million by now, I suppose. What a splendid couple they look, Hester and he, but—" with a calculating shake of the head, "but seven thousand a year would be too great a sacrifice to make for any man, would it not? That's her history up to date. I wonder if this return to the world will add another page to it."

I wondered too; they were certainly well matched, that handsome couple: the woman unspeakably graceful and winning in every varying expression, the man with his six-feet-one of well-moulded figure and keen intelligent face, physically her equal, whether so in higher matters I have never been able to determine. Mr. Furness danced though Hester did not, but frequent intervals brought him back to her side the evening through. I could see his tall head turned her way, watching her across the brilliant throng when half the room divided them, and when my widow departed Mr. Furness's arm was the much envied one which guided her down the crowded staircase, wrapped her in satin and sables, and escorted her to her waiting carriage.

A good many glances followed this exit. Some I caught not entirely of satisfaction. The first, swift, vivid—"Jealous, as sure as I'm an old maid," thought I—from a fair-haired girl in clouds of blue tulle, waltzing rather wearily as the two went by. Another, quick, scared, but rapidly concealed, from a fine elderly man, I easily guessed without my friend's explanatory whisper, as the senior Furness.

In those glances, plus such as James Furness bent upon her in that night's last minutes, lay indeed the next page of Hester's history.

One reappearance was sufficient to make friends of all sorts and conditions claim her back among them. "I tell dear 'Ester she mustn't be an 'ermit at her hage any longer," Mrs. Dobson would say blandly, and every one else being of the mayoress's opinion, the most was made of the single precedent, and that autumn saw an end of Mrs. Sullivan's seclusion. To her own amused surprise she was wanted here, there and everywhere. A big hospital bazaar owed its success to her support, that every one saw and acknowledged; it was not every one, though, who knew that the ward for which it furnished part funds was quietly completed from her purse. The sweet full voice, which in its girlish growth her husband had kept solely for his private edification, now delighted scores of listeners. Numerous became her engagements as unpaid

prima donna to audiences varying from drawing-rooms to docks. In a wider sense than she had ever yet known, she began to feel the fulness of her womanly powers and frankly delighted in the sway always dear to her sex. New rays of happiness shot athwart her steps every day, and by degrees there stole about them a light supreme before which others paled: the light of that mystery which had been but dimly disclosed in the brief placid years of her early marriage.

For wherever Hester went James Furness was sure not to be far off. Their circle was the same, and they were constantly thrown together. At every greeting each seemed waiting for the other; at every parting, separation came harder. By nature as by form they seemed born to be mated. People called Mrs. Sullivan the "Winter Rose;" perhaps it was the work of the yet voiceless happiness within her, but she looked surpassingly lovely all that season through, a very rose in good truth.

The man she was winning was no mere boy to lose his head for a fair face. Business was bred in him, and seven thousand a year was no light sum, he felt, to be renounced for him. But there came a moment when he asked her to do it, asked and was not repulsed.

A reception was going on at one of the city prince's houses. Hester Sullivan had been a dinner guest, but the place beside her had not been occupied, as had grown usual on such occasions, by James Furness. It was late in the evening when he arrived; a throng of people gathered round the piano where an Italian artist sang. With a word of apology to his hostess, he made his way direct to the further end of the room where Hester Sullivan sat alone, for a marvel, looking wistful, almost sad.

No more delicious flattery could have been devised for the man than the glorious glad blush with which she received him. Happily they were unobserved, for he kept her hand long enough to set all the gossips in the room congratulating had they but noticed them. Then releasing it, his own eyes darkening though his face grew pale, he said, seating himself on the deep cushioned *tête-à-tête*:

"I am late, but here only for a few minutes, Mrs. Sullivan. I came simply because I knew I should meet you. Most unexpectedly I have to go abroad—only over to Savannah"—very tenderly as she gave a quick frightened start, "on some pressing business with cotton growers which my father refuses to trust to any but myself. Still, I fear I shall not be back under six weeks and I can't, I *cannot* go till—till I have said something to you. Hester, you know what it is without any words. Whether I'm right to speak, I dare not say. I simply must, though it seems asking you to give up too much. Will what I have to offer you in its stead seem enough to you? That and—my love?"

His voice, laden with earnestness, his close presence, the over-

flowing of her answering heart bewildered her. Tears truly, but tears of joy, glistened in her soft eyes as she raised them mutely to his. He saw the womanly, unworldly surrender of that reply, and yearned to bind her fast with ready promises. But generosity must not be hers alone. Certain that he could trust her, he could well afford to give her seeming liberty.

"Think of it," he said gently, "while I am absent. Count yourself free till I come back. The first hour of my return will bring me to you. Heaven only knows how long every moment will be till then."

A storm of applause drowned what she would have said. The musical throng dispersing swept by our pair. The host came seeking Mrs. Sullivan to sing, and led her off, James Furness following. He stood by her till the end of her song, hardly hearing it, only exulting in the thought that the singer was so nearly his. Then, as ending she turned instinctively to him, he had with infinite reluctance to bid her good-night and good-bye.

"My leaving is so sudden," he said, under cover of examining her music, "I had barely time to escape here even for these few minutes. By the time you are—asleep, I must be on board the 'Oriana' and off by the morning tide. For six weeks—Hester."

One long look that seemed to both a silent betrothal; one silent, lingering hand-clasp, then he was gone; and Hester felt as though she had never known loneliness till now.

For six weeks, long, happy, dreamlike, she had to wait for him, counting the hours till he came back; dwelling with wondering fondness on the words with which she would meet him, planning how this her own crown of joy should in nowise disturb the comfort of those still largely dependent on her. For all her uncalculating liberality a considerable margin of her income had been unused throughout her widowhood. The few hundreds a year she would still be mistress of, would be a full sufficiency for her father and his now upgrowing second brood. "He" now enthroned as husband in her heart would readily spare that she felt assured, anxious as herself that no regret should cast a shadow on their marriage. For herself she would willingly go fortuneless to him, glorying in the thought that never would she let him repent taking his wife undowered. And thus as spring opened on the earth, another spring, sweet as life's awakening in paradise, opened in Hester Sullivan's bosom, and though the days lagged slowly on she could not wish them fleeter, so brimful were they of delicious promise.

But her hours of probation were growing short. It was more than a week since she had seen the "Oriana's" departure telegraphed from its southern port. A sense of tremulous anticipation took possession of her, and one soft April evening reached a point which drove her restlessly from books to flowers and flowers to music,

unable to occupy herself with any or all, overborne with a feeling between hope and dread of something very nigh impending.

That strange presentiment was right. As she wandered aimlessly among the palms and ferns and perfumed treasures of her conservatory, she heard a step on the gravelled sweep outside. Presently the drawing-room door was opened. A caller so late as this was most unusual. Who could it be but one? She flushed vividly as a servant came towards her with, "Mr. Furness, ma'am, wishes to see you." Then he was here before his time. All her pulses gave a bound of delight and yet she shook like a girl as she went forward and met—not James Furness but his father.

The shock of a terrible fear came over her at sight of him. He was bringing ill tidings of his son; all her suspicions confirmed by the distressed gravity of the old man's face, the colour ebbed from her own as she hurried to him asking:

"What is it, Mr. Furness? What have you come to tell me? Has something happened to—to——?"

She could not end, but her secret, which no outsider was supposed to know, stood revealed in the moment's great alarm. Love spoke in every anxious syllable. Her hearer recognized it too well and his head dropped as he answered:

"Nothing has happened, Mrs. Sullivan, such as—as you mean. My son is homeward bound, safe, I believe, and well."

"Thank God," she whispered softly, her hands unlocking, light coming to her eyes again and colour to her cheeks.

"Then," with a welcoming gesture, "please be seated, Mr. Furness. Will you——" confused and blushing at what her manner had betrayed, "excuse my seeming startled, guests rarely drive over here so late."

"I have not driven, Mrs. Sullivan," said Mr. Furness, sinking into the chair she offered; "I waited for the dusk, then walked from our place. I wanted as few as might be to know of my coming for——"

He stopped, curiously embarrassed.

Looking at him she saw he was stooping, his features careworn and deeply agitated.

"You are tired, or ill. Let me ring for refreshments for you. May I take your hat?" waiting kindly on him. "Nothing, I hope, is amiss with Mrs. Furness?"

An exclamation escaped him something like a sob. Frightened afresh, she put her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Why, what is it? Can I do anything to help you?"

"Ah, that you can," he said, "you and no other on earth, Mrs. Sullivan," grasping her wrists and gazing beseechingly at her, "I have come on an errand that will surely make you wish I had been in my grave—wish it as bitterly as I do myself. Don't stand to listen, for it is a tale not told in a moment." She seated

herself trembling under the chill of vague disaster. "First tell me, have you promised to marry my son?"

"Promised," she repeated, crimsoning, her parting from him pictured all before her; "promised? In very words, no, Mr. Furness."

"But he has asked you?"

"Yes."

"And you put off decision? Heaven be praised! Then there may yet be escape for us all."

"Mr. Furness, it was your son who would not accept my decision, though it was ready for him. But," proudly, "he loves me! What escape do you mean, then, there is for you? Are you ashamed of the wife he has chosen?"

"Dear lady, no; a thousand times, no! and yet," with a most piteous accent of entreaty, "I come to pray you not to marry him—but to reject him."

"I cannot!" she cried passionately, and for a minute there was silence between them. Then Mr. Furness drank his cup of humiliation to the bitter dregs, and told her why he asked.

"Mrs. Sullivan, we are counted among the richest people of our city. In reality we are bankrupts. My son knows nothing of this. The part of our trading under his management has prospered. The firm's accounts I have kept always to myself, and he has no suspicion. I have lost tens of thousands these last few years in speculations he had no part in. But that is the bare fact. When he returns to England, it may be to learn that we are beggared."

She took a long, long breath. Well, beggary with him was better than wealth without him; he had asked her to share his riches, she would show him she was ready to share his poverty. Granted but love and trust between them, what was there to fear?

"For you it is most sad, Mr. Furness," she said soothingly, "but—but *we* shall not be afraid. It need not part him and me."

The old man laid his head upon his arms with a groan. "That is not all," he faltered; "despise me as you will, I must tell the rest. I have a niece, Mrs. Sullivan, the only child of a brother who was my partner; she is left in my guardianship, has lived with us half her life; her fortune has always been in my control; she will be of age next June, then the money must be forthcoming if she chooses to live elsewhere and claim it. Mrs. Sullivan, it is—gone! The devil tempted me to use it for a last hope, for a foreign investment, which I believed might turn the scale, might make us all rich again by now; but now the Continent is racked by threatenings of war, money is at a dead lock; if I sell out I shall not get a quarter of Lucy's thousands back; the world, my son, will know me for a swindler! If I can run the chances of three more months, my desperate venture may have success. We may be saved."

Hester turned her eyes away, shamed for the ruined man's self

shame; groping through the sorrowful maze for her own part in the play.

"And how," she said, "am I to be of use by doing what you ask?"

"This is how. Lucy, my niece, has grown through girlhood into true fondness for my son. She knew our wish was for their marriage. He knew it too, liked her well, and though they had had no actual courtship, seemed likely enough to take the wife we wished, till he saw you. That altered everything. Lucy marked it first, left us when she found how things were going and went with friends to Italy. With them, if you had married James," Hester shivered at the uncertain tense, "she would have stayed, but if she hears that he is free she will come back. If you refuse him, if James knows that the child went from us ill and wounded at dread of losing him, if I tell him part of my misfortunes, he may yet marry her and all will be healed over for some of us."

"For some of us," the bald cruelty of the proposal smote even the luckless old merchant as he made it. "For some!" but not for that beautiful heart-stricken woman opposite. Goaded by fierce instinct of self-preservation, he had laid bare the whole truth, but had asked surely more than any man had right to expect of even the noblest nature. One glance at Hester's rigid face showed such silent agony as almost compelled him to recant.

"It must be as you will," he cried hoarsely, "the honour of our name has been like the breath of life to James, but to gain you he may even bear to see it in the dust. Judge for him, I cannot. His mother, who toiled and laboured with me helping to build her boy's fortune, her it will kill. Oh my wife, my wife!"

Broken down, James Furness's father wept piteously. The grief of age is terrible, it nigh drove Hester from her senses; how could she even think with that storm-beaten figure crouching before her?

"Leave me," she said slowly, her lips cold, her voice dulled with despair; "I will tell no one, I will write to you to-morrow."

He could neither offer nor ask farewell. Stumbling his way alone the old man quitted the house, and Hester was left to solitary pain.

A servant presently brought in a letter, come by the last post; she read it twice, thrice, before she recognized its bearing on her present plight. It was from her step-mother, telling of new troubles at home; her father worse, his doctors saying nothing but German baths and living out of England would preserve his life. The eldest boy, too, just started on his way to work in India, had met with an accident and must come home invalided for a year, and other cares there were of lesser sort, for all of which it was plain relief was expected from the rich sister's purse, the purse she had been longing, planning to empty.

No such sharp battle had she ever known as the one Hester fought through that long, weary night. Not only to cast wealth away for herself and others who looked to her for comfort, but to fling aside the last straw of prosperity to which the man she loved

might cling; to fasten on him, with her acknowledged love, chains of poverty, and on his name dishonour, that might tarnish it for ever! And yet to give him up, not to prosperity alone, that she could have borne, but to the mild cousinly love that must henceforth supplant her own! No wonder was it, that when morning broke the white-faced woman who rose from her knees to look out upon the fading stars felt as if in the dark hours the burden of years had been laid upon her, that never a dawn again would lead her on to the lost light of love and happiness!

Mr. Furness had his note next day, only one line. "It shall be as you desire.—H. S."

Ten days afterwards, when James Furness reached land and went straight to Hester's home, he there met only blankest desolation; drawn blinds, bolted doors and for himself merely a letter, "that Mrs. Sullivan left," the care-taker of the house said, "when she went away for good last week."

In that letter was his refusal; final, hopeless in cruel firmness, though its sad sentences pointed to something beyond the control of either as its mainspring.

Half stupefied at first under the blow so little looked for, young Mr. Furness may have followed up the faint clue later on. Something perhaps his father told unasked; more he might guess. Any way Lucy Furness was soon back from Italy, ready to comfort him if he so would. Before the summer was out they two were married. Queer whispers had been afloat concerning the firm, but they resulted in nothing. European peace was preserved, "Furness and Son," got the turn of luck which floated them back into prosperity. The younger man, they say, is more devoted to business than to home, but he is a kind husband nevertheless, though Mrs. Dobson never ceases to wonder why he did not marry her beautiful neighbour instead of "that little hay-coloured thing, Madam Lucy."

Hester I saw at Cannes last winter. Her father is her constant care, Mrs. Boyce being much and pleasantly occupied in using her step-daughter's money among her own young folk in England. Mrs. Sullivan is a grave, sweet woman with every spark of youth gone out of her face; she might be nearer fifty than thirty, but she is one who leaves her mark for good wherever she goes, so life cannot be all clouds to her.

But when I see her great soft eyes longingly following, perhaps some pretty children at play, and when I think of what fate cut her off from, then I often wonder if she did right or wrong; if James Furness was a wise man or a fool; if it was cruel "chance" or kind which left my "one poor widow" alone.

And I wonder and wonder all to no purpose. Others may solve the enigma; I give it up.

"FOR LOVE OF HIM."

By A. N. HOMER

A STORY IN TWO PARTS.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

PEDRO AT HOME.

A VERY different scene is taking place in one of the white-walled villas in the outskirts of Seville. In the patio, where Gonzala so ruthlessly murdered the frank, brave, but foolishly love-sick John Beauville, the broad leaves of the banana tree and the luxuriant foliage of the tropical ferns seem just as green and flourishing, and from the marble fountain in the centre falls the same broad jet of water, sparkling and dancing, with its ceaseless, soothing murmur; the very cane lounge on which the honest Cornishman smoked his last pipe and told his seeming friend the history of his troubled life, is there just as it was, and much in the same position as on that fatal night. Within, in one of the rooms, the windows of which open on to the patio, lounging full length on a sofa, with a well-pleased expression on his treacherous face, is Pedro Gonzala. His waist is girt with a bright-coloured *fajas*, from the folds of which protrudes the half-hidden hilt of a knife. A broad-brimmed sombrero is carelessly thrown upon the table, and, with his head propped up by cushions, the worthy don appears to be perfectly satisfied with himself; dense clouds of blue smoke curl from under his thick moustachios from the half-smoked stump of a cigarette. The furniture of the room is sombre and massive in the extreme, and the walls are decorated by a few portraits. One, representing a dark fierce-looking man, attired in a rich cavalry uniform, bears the same features as Gonzala, and the resemblance is so striking as to leave no doubt that he is a descendant, though probably a most unworthy one. There is a sound, and the door is opened to admit a white-haired, shrunken-visaged woman, a lady evidently, though her form is bowed by years and grief.

"Pedro," she says in a thin cracked voice. The man she addresses might be asleep or dead for all the notice he troubles himself to take.

"My son," she continues, this time approaching him and gently touching his shoulder.

"Well, what is it, mother?" he answers at last with an ill-tempered snarl. "What is it? Is it impossible for a man to be left alone for an hour in peace? I had placed that book," pointing to a pretty heavy volume lying on the table within easy reach, "so that I might fling it at the head of that confounded servant did she but disturb me, and now, just when I thought I was alone, you come. Well, and what has brought you?"

The face of the old lady is a study. At first a pained, grieved expression steals across it at his harsh, unkind tones. This, her son, to address her thus! Then a softened, more kindly look overspreads her aged countenance, visions of the banished past, when he, a round-cheeked chubby boy, her pet, her darling, hung upon her words, liked nothing better than the soft touch of her hand, the gentle, loving kiss, and knelt to say his nightly prayer in pure and white-robed innocence. Oh! that the Blessed Virgin had more kindly listened to those childish orisons and seen fit to raise him up to manhood a comfort and support to her old age. This thought comes last, and then she speaks, her voice still full of dignity:

"My son, I grieve to trouble you, and would have sent a servant, but feared your headstrong and most ungovernable passion, so came myself to tell you that a stranger wants to see you."

"Then, in the devil's name have him shown in. Why all this long and useless sermon? Am I a child?"

"I would you were, for then once more I'd strive to mould you to what you might be."

"A very pretty idea. Well, trouble me no more with all this fine motherly advice. I am sick of sermons preached to me in this fashion, so save yourself the trouble in future. Who is this man?"

"I do not know; but by his appearance I should judge him to be a most unfit companion for you."

"El diavolo! am I ever to be schooled?"

"Have you no pride?"

"None. It vanished when I found myself with scarce a peseta."

"Thanks to your noble father, we have enough to live upon, though quietly."

"Sufficient to enable us to exist, rather call it—not to live."

"Better life in poverty with honour than riches wrung from the needy hands of others. Think of your dead father, and of what he left you, without spot or blemish: an illustrious name handed down from father to son through a long line of brave hidalgos. Think, my son, and pause ere it be too late. This man who waits to see you has, my heart misgives me, come to tempt you to some new and hateful crime. The awful nature of the ones

you have committed may be atoned for yet, for the Blessed Virgin will not turn a deaf ear to your prayers."

"Oh, cease this empty babble and leave me. You will tempt my patience once too often, and then I shall vent my rage upon you for want of some one better," answers Gonzala, brutally bounding from the sofa where he had lain all this time, and with rough hands pushing his mother from the room.

The features of the old lady are convulsed with pain, and her eyes, from which the beauty of youth has for ever fled, are filled with hot salt tears at this further evidence of insult and want of love on the part of her son.

"The only way to get rid of the old pest; she is eternally treating me to lectures of this kind, interminable in length as they are useless in effect. Santissima Madre! she would turn me into a whining priest if I listened to her railings," says Gonzala, pacing about the apartment with restless strides, his talon-like fingers employed the while in the manufacture of another cigarette, which he rolls with marvellous rapidity, acquired by long practice, for he, like many Spaniards, smokes the whole day.

"Well, who is it? Come in," he continues, in answer to a knock at the door, and in anything but a polite tone of voice. His question is answered by the entrance of a rather singular and decidedly unpleasant-looking individual. In years he might have been anything between forty to sixty, so wrinkled and marked had his face become from dissipation and unchecked passions. His skin resembles tough parchment, burnt by exposure to a dusky mahogany tint. His jet-black eyes are set deep in his head, and as near as seems possible to his prominently-hooked nose. He carries his right arm in a sling, and his dress is an odd mixture of rusty velvet, fastened by shining silver buttons. As this gentleman makes his appearance, Gonzala surveys him with an insolent stare, and without any attempt at a greeting, exclaims:

"José Guieriela."

"The same. At your service, Senor Capitano," answers that worthy, quietly eyeing Gonzala in his turn.

"Why are you here?"

"To see you, senor."

"To see me?"

"Precisely, senor. I have come with no other object."

"In the name of all the devils, why could you not wait?"

"It was inconvenient, senor."

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that I could wait no longer for the sum you promised me in payment of my services."

"Did I not arrange to see you at the 'Fonda del Oriente?'"

"Yes, senor. And had that long-legged heretic not broken my arm, I might have waited with patience."

"What difference could that make?"

"The greatest."

"What, in the fiend's name?"

"The best of all reasons, *senor*. I had no money."

"And you have the impudence to pester me here for a few pieces which I happen to owe you. Could you not borrow?" Up to this point the face of Guieriela had preserved its habitually taciturn expression, but the idea of any one lending him money seems to tickle his fancy immensely, and he bursts into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Why do you laugh?"

"At the bare notion of any one taking compassion on José Guieriela. No, no. There is not a living soul between this and Granada, not even a simple old *padre*, who would value his money so little as to intrust it to my keeping. I have played that game too often, *senor*. You see I have an unfortunate way of forgetting to repay these small debts. They always seem to possess an unaccountable knack of escaping my memory, and so all save fools have grown tired of it."

"Well, and——"

"I thought I would come to you, *senor*, just to remind you about the little sum you owe me."

"Well, take it, and be gone," replies Gonzala, turning savagely upon Guieriela, and flinging some gold upon the table. "But mark one thing well. Never seek me here again. Your greed for gain had best carry you some other road." Guieriela's attention, at this moment, is too busily employed in counting the money thrown to him. A second time he counts the coins, and as he does so his face grows dark. The muscles of his forehead and neck stand out like whip-cord, his gleaming beads of eyes twinkle wickedly.

"*Senor*, you have made a mistake," at length he says.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"You have given me ten pieces less than you promised."

"And suppose I have. What then?"

"You will rectify the error, *senor*. You cannot wish to rob me of my hard-earned gains. My wounded arm—it will be weeks before I shall have the use of it again."

"You should have taken better care of yourself."

"The *Senor Beauville's* stick was long and his arm heavy. Curse him! Yet I like him none the less for the blow he struck. It was neatly done, and my arm snapped like a palm leaf. But above all, *senor*, I hold you to your promise. You will give me the sum in full."

"I shall not."

"You refuse to do me justice, and at the same time keep your word."

"You have done well. Not another peseta will you get from me."

"In that case, Senor Pedro Gonzala, I shall wish you good day. If you will not pay me justly it is no fault of mine. But the next time we shall have a different understanding." The Judas Iscariot expression of his features increases as he says these words, apparently with the most supreme indifference, but in reality with a hidden meaning. A smile is on his face as he quits the room with his sombrero under his arm, but once in the road clear of the house his rage knows no bounds. A torrent of horrible oaths and coarse maledictions escape his lips, and with his face pale with deadly hatred and resentment, he walks off, but too surely bent on mischief.

CHAPTER II.

A WILL OF HER OWN.

BUT few changes have taken place at Pentrouel Court since Rupert Beauville left it. Inside the old house the aspect of affairs is gloomy and no one quite seems to know what is wrong. In the servants' hall grumblings are of frequent occurrence, and the stout cheery-faced cook tells the coachman that she "have never knowed it to be so dull ever since she came to service at the Court, and that must be nigh upon thirty years." Clarice Polwuth has wandered restlessly from room to room, pleased and contented with no living thing save Shot the spaniel; she has gone for long walks, to old frequented spots, the dog being her sole companion on these excursions, making poor Miss Cubley half distracted by returning with her feet completely soaked with the deep mud of the narrow high-banked lanes. Then she is the first to enter the breakfast-room in the morning, with the vain expectation of receiving some news from the man she loves. And often she watches for hours, from the battlements of the old ivy-clad tower, for the well-known figure of the village postman. The contents of the last few letters from Rupert Beauville have been a source of great anxiety rather than of comfort to her. For in a careless, offhand manner he has spoken of his romantic meeting with a wondrously lovely Spanish girl, and in one note had even given a detailed account of how he rescued her from the hands of some fellow, who certainly must have had designs upon her purse, if he attacked her with no worse intention. To Clarice these remarks are intolerable, the whole story is absurdly after the style of a novel, so much more like a far-fetched extravaganza of the chivalrous past, than these matter-of-fact prosaic days. And yet she feels how dangerously fraught with evil it may be to her, and how it may be the means of ruining her hopes for life, for she can love none other than Rupert Beauville. What will be the upshot of his continued intimacy with this foreign girl, she shudders to

think. And she, what can she do, hundreds of miles away from him, in this stupid old country house, when she longs to be at his side, to guard him from the wiles and arts of this too probably designing woman? Her heart is torn with feelings of jealousy. She has borne this state of things for days and she has at length come to the conclusion that she can bear it no longer. Besides, an idea has occurred to her. Anything better than this ridiculously hum-drum inactivity, and at such a time, when Rupert may be snatched from her by the alluring arts of this black-eyed Sevillana, of whose beauty, as a race, she has often read in books. To think with Clarice is to act. So one morning, when the post has passed, bringing no news, Clarice enters Miss Cubley's private sanctum, where she is sitting deep in the details of her weekly expenditure, and pretty nearly causes that good person to faint away with surprise and astonishment; but then that too sensitively organized lady has, or appears to have, a loose faint always at her command; it fits in well, and is effective. The resolute expression on Clarice's rosy lips is marked as she says:

“You had better make the necessary arrangements for leaving here on Monday, Miss Cubley.”

“Good gracious me, my dear! what *do* you mean,” replies the lady addressed dropping her pen and holding up her hands in bewildered astonishment.

“Precisely what I say.”

“What, leave Pentrouel Court?”

“Yes.”

“Dear to goodness me! and where for, may I ask?”

“For Spain.”

“My gracious! *you* go to Spain! What would your poor dear father say were he alive?”

“Now listen to me, you dear old Cubby,” answers Clarice familiarly. “I do not want you to attempt to raise any objections, because they would be useless.”

“But, my dear, how can you possibly leave here? I must come with you, of course, and then who is there left to look after the place? Mr. Rupert would be astounded, I am sure.”

“Rupert is to know nothing whatever about it.”

“How can you behave to him in this way? Why, of course he would never have left home himself had he not trusted you implicitly. Do listen to me and think before you take this step. As I have known and served you so long, I venture to give you my advice. Let me entreat you to pause.”

The life Clarice had led with her father, when, motherless, she had ruled with an almost despotic sway, the numerous servants so essential to life in India, had no doubt had its effect in nourishing her self-will and adding to her perfect reliance on her own ability to use authority. So she turns to Miss Cubley with a decidedly haughty expression on her fair face.

"Thanks for your advice, well meant, I know, but a little out of place just now; besides, perhaps it may be useful to remark that I expect obedience to my wishes from those about me." Never, during her long and faithful service had Miss Cubley ever been spoken to so harshly, so no wonder the colour leaves her cheeks and tears unbidden rush to her eyes. Clarice is not slow to notice this, for though quick-tempered and resolute, she is far too kindly and generous to wilfully wound the feelings of another. In a moment she has said a few kind words, with her gentle winning smile, and matters are smoothed as if by magic.

"Now I am going to confide in you entirely," she says at length. "I intend to go to Seville, but as it would not do for Rupert to know that I have actually followed him, we must keep our movements a secret."

"How is that possible?"

"It is extremely simple. My plan is this. You will leave everything here in the care of Jones, who is thoroughly trustworthy, with instructions to forward letters to an address in London, which I will give you. This is Saturday; on Monday we shall start from Pentrouel by the 10.30 up train for town."

"And Simpkins?"

"I shall leave her behind. Her tongue runs too freely, and if she came our doings would furnish endless gossip for the servants." Simpkins, be it known, is Clarice's maid.

"Good gracious! what, travel without Simpkins?" asks Miss Cubley with pious horror.

"Yes."

"But, my dear, you will find it so inconvenient."

"Not with your help."

"Oh! well, no; that makes a difference, certainly—but——"

"You see my motive for taking this journey is this," pursues Clarice. "I believe Rupert is in peril. *He* might be murdered like his brother. A score of things *might* happen to him, and I cannot stay here."

"Getting your feet wet every day," puts in Miss Cubley maliciously.

"Exactly; so I will leave everything in your hands, and you can give out, if questions *are* asked, and no doubt they will be, that we are going to London. Only be sure to say nothing of our movements after we get there," adds Clarice with a sweet rippling laugh. "And now I am going out for a blow and a breath of fresh air for a few moments before lunch, so *au revoir* for the present." With Shot bounding by her side Clarice seeks the winding path which leads down the cliffs to the beach, all the while humming a favourite air of Rupert's for very joy of heart at having come to a decision.

The sun on the longed-for day of departure breaks in clear, cold, cloudless beauty. Hurriedly, final instructions are given,

good-byes to all her pets are said; Shot's silky head lovingly caressed for the last time, and his cold nose thrust against her cheek, with a whine of disapproval as if he knows all that is going on, and no doubt he does, poor doggie. The steps are put up, the carriage door banged to, and in forty minutes Clarice and Miss Cubley are seated in a well-padded first-class carriage, on their way to town *en route* for Seville.

CHAPTER III.

WHO IS THIS MAN?

To Rupert Beauville, ever since the night of his romantic meeting with Dona Isidore, the time had passed only too quickly, and the sunny hours sped by, leaving his mind troubled with but one thought, his brother. Had he done aught to clear his memory of the foul stain resting upon it? His conscience told him no. He had tried, but failed signally. His intimacy with Dona Isidore is fast deepening into something more than mere interest. When he has left her, he finds himself counting the hours until he shall be with her again. But Dona Isidore ruthlessly exercises her despotic sway. What cares she, a finished coquette, the tool of a heartless ruffian, whether she piques the vanity of this man or not? To send him away and recall him again at her will rather strengthens her position than otherwise, for it proves that already she can do with him as she pleases. So many an ingenious little fib and well-concocted story she trumps up whenever she does not choose to be troubled with his society. No, dismissing poor Rupert in high dudgeon rather pleases her, for well she knows that, moth-like, he will return again, the more determinedly to singe his wings. Lounging on a couple of chairs, Rupert is trying, with the aid of a Manilla cheroot, to digest the ill-cooked dinner served up to him by his honest landlady. The threatened symptoms of dyspepsia do not alter the cheerful expression of his face, the reason for which may be better accounted for by explaining that he has not seen Dona Isidore for two whole days, and is going to present himself to-night. He will see her again, and the thought makes him supremely happy.

“I wonder how it will all end?” he mutters audibly. “What would the whole county think of me if I returned to Pentrouel with a wife, and she a Spaniard? But it is time to go,” he says, glancing at his gold hunting watch and hastily quitting the house; a sharp walk brings him to Dona Isidore's door. Lights are visible in the windows of the rooms he knows she occupies, and without delay—for he is an expected guest—he is ushered into her presence.

"Ah! how good of you to come, *senor*. I thought you had forgotten."

"Forgotten! *Dona Isidore*; surely you did not think so ill of me?"

"I am not quite certain; you must pardon us women, *senor*, if we fall into the habit of thinking lightly of your sex. It is not our fault, and experience alone teaches wisdom. Mine has taught me that men are not to be trusted."

"Is there nothing to be urged on our side?"

"Ah! I don't know."

"Let me ask you, *Dona Isidore*, are there not scores of honest-hearted fellows whose lives are embittered, their natures soured, the whole tenor of their existence changed by a woman's faithlessness?"

"I cannot answer your question, *senor*; but, at any rate, they are well able to fight their own battles. My opinion is that we are more sinned against than sinning."

"But you cannot support your argument. I am confident that men would be different were women less cruel."

"Ah! I do not know. But you are gloomy. Come and tell me if you can boast of aught as beautiful as this in your country." Touching his hand lightly, she moves towards an open window. Stretched beneath them, at their very feet, but far below them, lies the fair city, bathed in shadowy moonlight, with the waters of the Guadalquivir silently rolling their irresistible volume on and on until lost to sight. Solitary palms, with slender trunks, and tufts of foliage waving gently with the evening breeze, tall spires and glittering domes, villas half buried in leafy verdure, their white walls glistening, the whole enveloped in a faint blue haze which makes the distant objects shadowy and unreal. Rupert is struck with the exquisite beauty of the scene. The silence is intense; all nature seems buried in peaceful slumber, for not a sound reaches them from the busy thoroughfares beneath. *Dona Isidore* is the first to speak.

"Well, *senor*, have you any town in England as beautiful as this?"

"None, I fear."

"You admit it?"

"Yes. We can scarcely rival Seville, and yet some places on our coasts are very beautiful."

"But oh, so cold and damp," adds the girl, shivering as if she already felt the keen air of the Channel.

"Not in summer."

"I am told you have none, *senor*, you cannot be sure of a week of fine warm weather at a time; and the fog is so yellow and dense that you cannot see your hand before your face; at least so Pedro tells me."

"Who is Pedro, may I ask?" inquires Beauville quickly.

“Only a friend, but he has visited England and has told me all about it,” replies Dona Isidiore, as if anxious to dismiss the subject.

“I have never met him here.”

“No, senor, I see but little of him now.”

Two doors open into the room, and the very individual of whom they have just been speaking, Don Pedro Gonzala, is peering through one of them completely hidden from view by the Cordova leathern screen which is placed before it, that entrance to the chamber being but seldom used, as it only communicates with empty apartments. The truth is, that it is not in Gonzala's nature to believe in any person's honesty and faith for long, and of late he has begun to think that he has made a false step by allowing this intimacy between the woman he loves, or thinks he does, and Beauville. At any rate he doubts her good faith. Why should she not play him false? women are wise as serpents, but by no means as harmless as doves. It is possible that she might end by falling in love with the Englishman. Why not? With this idea in his head, unknown to Dona Isidiore, Gonzala has come to play the eavesdropper.

“And so he speaks but slightly of the old country?” asks Beauville, pursuing the conversation.

“Yes, it is cold, and, he says, so are the hearts of the people,” adds Dona Isidiore with a mischievous ogle in her black eyes.

“Then he speaks falsely, Dona Isidiore; have you found it so?”

“How can I tell? you are the only Englishman I ever knew.”

If Beauville needed a friend at any time he does now, for he is no longer master of himself. The girl's beauty acts like a spell upon him, he longs to gaze into the lustrous depths of her glorious eyes, to kiss the rich full lips; and carried away, he exclaims:

“Dona Isidiore, I came here to-night full of thoughts of love for you. I can keep them to myself no longer. Listen to me, Isidiore. It is in your power to make me happy. Be my wife.”

Dona Isidiore's face is as calm and placid as if attending an evening *tertulia*, her cheek does not pale, and no tell-tale blush o'erspreads it. To Rupert, in his calmer moments, these signs would have been evidence sufficient to convince him that she does not care for him, but he notices nothing and plunges on recklessly.

“I have money, I have position—all, everything I lay at your feet, to do with as you will. Do not refuse. Ah! I have been too precipitate; Isidiore, do you love me?”

Now it does not suit Dona Isidiore to tell him flatly that she does not, for then she might be going too far. He might never return to the house again, and how far this would please Gonzala she does not know. But she is cool, and far too finished an actress to

be at a loss for words, so she lowers her eyes before his ardent gaze.

"You are impetuous, senor; you must give me time. I cannot answer you at once."

"Isidore, you love me, I know it. To-morrow I shall come for your answer."

His arm is round her and before she can evade it, his lips are pressed to hers.

"Good-bye, my darling, I can trust myself no longer; good-bye until to-morrow."

As he rushes from the room, luckily he does not hear a half-stifled curse of pent-up rage which leaves Gonzala's lips, his excitement renders him oblivious to the sound, and with hasty steps he gains the street, saved by the merest chance from open collision with his bitterest enemy. How he reached home Rupert Beauville never remembers to this hour. His brain is in a whirl, his pulse beats wildly with excited joy and over-heated imagination. How he longs to see her again, to clasp this woman whom he loves to his heart; to feel her warm sweet breath upon his cheek, her eyes, filled with love for him, gazing into his. All this he pictures to himself. Had he but been able to glance for one moment into the vanished past and have learnt that she whom he loves, whom he has asked to share his life, is the same cold-blooded, unscrupulous woman who wrecked his brother's life and caused his early death, how his very soul would have revolted at the sight of her, and yet, knowing nothing, how he loves her. Far into the night he sits and smokes and drinks deep draughts of wine. At length he seeks his couch and falls asleep, but not to rest, phantoms and myriad ghostly forms chase madly through his brain. He is at home, his boyish years are lived again, he sees his mother's gentle face, bending to bless his nightly slumber and softly touch his cheek with farewell kiss, another moment and he is standing on the narrow strip of shining golden sand, the snowy-crested waves breaking at his feet with ceaseless soothing sound, he hears the croak of the cormorant and shrill cry of the white sea-mew. Suddenly the scene changes. He is in Seville. Oh, God! what is it that he sees? Again he stands within the house where his brother bid good-bye to life. *There—there's* his face, his form stretched out in writhing agony, his features fast blackening under the iron grip of the assassin's brutal hand; then, clearer still, he sees the cruel outline of the Spaniard's treacherous face: each striking point is there; as if impressed upon his brain by red hot iron or molten lead, oh, God! how well he sees that face, and then, as if in horrid mockery, loud rings his brother's death shriek. He starts up to hear the echo of his own wild yell of agony, as with the beads of sweat rolling from off his brow, he wakes only to find himself bolt upright in his bed, but conscious of his awful dream as though still asleep.

Restless and disturbed in mind, he turns and twists uneasily, courting, hopelessly and in vain, the favour of the fickle god. The faint pink rays of dawn shine through his chamber window, heralding the approach of another day, ere he sinks at length into a deep lethargic slumber. The heat of the mid-day sun has passed, and slowly the golden orb is dipping westward. Unroused from his dull lethargy by the feeble efforts made to wake him, Rupert has slept far into the day. Hastily he dresses, the subject of his dream unbidden rising up before him in most minute and terrible distinctness. In vain he tries to shake from him the baneful, unhealthy thoughts of the past few hours. He cannot. He is powerless. He feels his human will too weak to cope with supernatural agencies. In waking, as in sleeping, the pale, cruel outline of the murderer's face is stamped indelibly upon his brain. Remembering his words to Dona Isidiore, and longing to learn his fate from her own rosy lips, no sooner is his toilet completed and a cup of coffee swallowed, than he is once more on his way to her house. The windows and doors of the villa are thrown wide open to admit the cool refreshing breeze which is just springing up. Within fifty yards of the edifice, the thought occurs to Rupert to make his way unannounced into Dona Isidiore's presence ; it will be a surprise to her, for probably she will not expect to see him so early in the day. He knows well in which room to find her, and, intent upon carrying his idea into effect, with noiseless tread he ascends the staircase, passes along the corridor which leads to her favourite apartment, and softly pushing open the door, peeps in. The girl is within, as he expected, and, better still, alone. She is standing before the open doors of a curiously-carved cabinet. Pale glimmerings of sunlight linger on the jetty masses of her hair, and enhance the delicate colour on her soft smooth cheek. The finely-moulded contour of her figure is seen to perfect advantage by Beauville, as she stands sideways towards him, wholly unconscious that she is observed by any living soul. He cannot move ; he loves to look upon her thus, to picture to himself that she, this lovely being, is his own, possessed by him, his cherished wife. She presses some hidden spring, and a tiny secret drawer starts forth, from the depths of which she takes a miniature encased in dainty morocco. This outer covering laid aside, Rupert sees the head and shoulders of a man. Without a sound, scarce breathing, feelings of jealousy alone prompting him, he draws nearer. He seems to recognize that face. *It is, it must be so.* Suddenly he lays his hand upon the portrait. He cannot wait ; all courtesies are thrown aside ; he remembers conventionalities no longer. A sickening dread of coming evil thrills through every vein. Can she know who this is ? Can he be anything to her ? A score of different thoughts flash in that instant through his brain. With a stifled shriek of mingled terror and surprise, as

much at the expression on his face as at the strangeness of his action, Dona Isidore relinquishes her hold upon the picture.

“Who is he? What is his name?” he asks in a voice strangely calm and without a vestige of emotion. Her face is deathly white. No answer comes from between her tight-clenched lips.

“Tell me; who is this man?”

“Don Pedro Gonzala,” she replies boldly, as her natural hardihood reasserts itself.

“The murderer of my brother! And you, what do you know of him? Ah! your very face tells me that you are foully implicated in this hateful crime. He is your lover—speak!—this man whom I have come so far to bring to justice, a mean and treacherous assassin, his hands even yet red with my brother’s blood. Oh God! what have I done to be thus punished?”

Down on her knees she sinks and grovels at his feet; her tear-filled eyes are raised to his; her hands are clasped in supplicating mercy. Even in that awful moment he thinks how beautiful she is.

“Spare him,” she moans in low, heart-broken accents; “spare him; you love me, or you said you did. Let my prayers intercede for him.” Rupert’s blue eyes flash dangerously; his teeth are clenched; and as he draws himself to his full height, he seems to tower above this cringing pigmy of a woman, who has sacrificed him as relentlessly as she led his brother to believe she cared for him, and so caused his death.

“Woman, you ask too much,” he answers, his voice hoarse and quivering with the depth of his emotion.

“You are good and brave. What will it avail you, though you kill the living to avenge the dead? I love him; Oh God! you know not how much.”

“Then why did you trifle with me, why did you strive to make me love you, using your beauty as a bait, your cursed arts and devilries, to entrap *me*? Could you not have let me go my way in peace? What harm had I ever done you that you should single me out as your tool?”

“It was for his sake,” she murmurs in a weak faint voice. Again the old longing comes over him to clasp her in his arms, to forgive her all the harm she has done him, to bury the past, to fly with her. The world is wide, he has wealth, and with *her* love—then he recollects she does not care for him, her heart is given to that miserable Don Pedro Gonzala. The thought of his accursed name brings the hot fierce flush of envy and passion to his face.

“Senor Beauville,” she pleads, “for *my* sake, it is all I shall ever ask of you, forgive, as you hope to be forgiven. You will need it some day. Forgive, and may the Holy Virgin bless you.”

Ay, how true her words are, *he will need it some day*; and how near that hour may be none can know. What if he refuses? What if he lends a deaf ear to *her* prayers? May not *his* in the

hour of need be forgotten too? No thoughts such as these can fail to influence a mind so quick and impulsive, and yet withal so gentle as Rupert's. The rigid lines of firm resolve about his mouth relax. "It is right, and for her sake," he murmurs. Then he lifts his head.

"So be it, lady, what you ask, I grant. Never will I lift my hand against this man. *For your sake*, and for the remembrance of what *might* have been. I will not stay here longer, Dona Isidiore, lest I upbraid you, or recall my promise. May you be happy, and may he be as true to you, and love you, as I would have done." With tottering step, as of a man drunk with wine, his head bowed with bitter grief, and mind unhinged with the terrible ordeal he has gone through, sadly, and in deep sorrow, Rupert Beauville crosses for the last time the threshold of the house where he has spent so many happy hours.

CHAPTER IV.

VOICES.

CLARICE POLWURTH has contrived to make herself tolerably comfortable in the best rooms which the "Fonda del Oriente," Seville, affords. Some little time has elapsed since she came, and once or twice she has actually seen Beauville, but fortunately only at a distance, as hitherto she has managed to avoid a meeting face to face. But nothing has occurred to soothe her jealousy in the very smallest degree. Woman-like, she has even made a point of going to see the house where, by dint of inquiry, she has ascertained that Dona Isidiore lives, but this was all she had been able to do, so very naturally she feels just as perplexed and ill at ease as when she left Pentrouel.

"How very unfortunate it is that we did not bring Simpkins," remarks Miss Cubley, with a dissatisfied glance round the room in which she is sitting with Clarice, and which, by-the-bye, seems very fairly comfortable; "I have never ceased to regret it since we left Pentrouel." For what particular reasons, Miss Cubley carefully omits to state, but probably because Simpkins would have performed many little functions which in her absence had fallen upon the bony shoulders of Miss Cubley; the consequence being that the good but ill-used lady has resolved to read her young mistress a lesson, so that when she shall take it into her head to travel again, she, Miss Cubley, may not be made to perform the double duties of maid and companion. Ably she has done it, nearly worrying poor Clarice's life out. Not troubling herself to reply to this last remark, which has been repeated a hundred times, Clarice leaves her attendant to moralize as best she may, and retires to her own particular sleeping apartment. She has

not been there five minutes before her attention is attracted by the sound of voices raised in loud altercation, and apparently proceeding from the opposite side of the wall. She is about to move away, when she hears the deeper tones of another speaker, evidently the one in authority, using some name which appears to her familiar. Her curiosity fairly aroused, Clarice opens the door of a kind of closet, which has been built off the main partition, and used by her as a hanging wardrobe; standing inside she is enabled to make out disjointed words. "I must have been mistaken," she mutters, and is about to go. "They cannot be talking about him, it is absurd." But again she hears Beauville's name mentioned. It is impossible for her to be mistaken this time; whatever it may mean, he is the subject of the angry discourse.

"What can it be? In what way are they connected with him? Perhaps they are hatching some plot to do him harm." This last idea takes root. What more natural than to suppose that one of these men was a Spanish lover of Dona Isidore? This man, this lover, would most bitterly resent any attentions, be they ever so slight, on the part of Rupert Beauville. She is well aware that they cannot leave the hotel without passing by the entrance to her room, which opens into the same corridor.

"Not an instant is to be lost. I must, if possible, discover *who* they are." With this idea in her wise little head, Clarice dresses as if for a walk, resolving to enter the main passage just as the unknown leave their room, and thus get a good look at their faces. Her patience is not put to the test, for no sooner has she opened her door than she hears the latch of the next one click, and the men, three in number, all Spaniards, too, from their dress and appearance, file past her on their way downstairs. Eyeing them all rather pointedly in her anxiety, Clarice remarks the features of one more especially, and singles him out for a closer scrutiny—he is so ugly, his face is so repulsive, and a terrible scar seams his long hooked nose. He returns her gaze, perhaps pleased at having attracted the notice of one so beautiful and distinguished in appearance as Clarice.

That man would do anything for money, she thinks, reading him at a glance. Scarce knowing what she does, but rendered reckless by her fears that they will escape her, and that thus she will lose what she so much longs to discover, and which somehow she thinks may be of such vital importance to Rupert Beauville, astounded at her own audacity, she raises her hand and signs to the fellow. The signal is quickly answered by a low bow and a wave of his sombrero, unnoticed by the other two, who have gone on ahead and who are already in the street. But to Clarice's dismay, instead of returning to address her, he, too, lounges off after the others. Not daring to follow him, and satisfied that she has done all she can, yet wildly excited by what she has so casually over-

heard, she rushes back into the room where Miss Cubley is placidly doing some species of intricate needlework. The window commands a good view of the bustling thoroughfare in which she saw the mysterious stranger disappear, but, look as she will, she can discover no signs of him.

"He has gone," she exclaims breathlessly, regardless of Miss Cubley's presence.

"He—who?" inquires the much-afflicted spinster. "My dear, what are you talking about? Who *do* you mean?"

"Disappeared, without leaving a trace," pursues Clarice, craning her neck through the open casement in a vain endeavour to discover in the motley thronging crowd the face she seeks, but at length she is forced to give it up as hopeless.

"What shall I do?"

"Do, child—what is the matter? Why, I declare you look as if you had seen a ghost; your face is as white as a sheet. What has happened?" Miss Cubley feels curious and cross; she cannot get an answer to her repeated questions.

So she subsides into an unnatural calm, her hands are meekly folded before her, and she wears an expression of martyrdom difficult to imitate.

"And Rupert may be in danger," continues the incorrigible Clarice, utterly oblivious of the questions put to her. Miss Cubley can bear it no longer; even her divine patience *may* be tried *too* far. Getting up from her seat with calm and dignified step admirable to behold, she walks across the room to where Clarice is sitting and pulls her sleeve, gently at first, and then with a decided tug.

"Who have you met? What have you done? And what are you going to do? There, my dear, perhaps you may see fit to vouchsafe an answer to my inquiries. This is about the tenth time that I have asked you."

This last appeal has the effect of arousing Clarice, and she recounts all that she has heard and seen, with the exception of her own attempt to speak to one of the trio, which, as it failed in effect, is better left untold.

"What reason have you to suppose that they have any intention of injuring Mr. Rupert?" asks Miss Cubley testily, after she has listened attentively to the whole story.

"Oh, none that you would consider sufficiently good to justify me in thinking so, but I do nevertheless," answers Clarice, who, not having told Miss Cubley one word about Rupert's romantic meeting with Dona Isidiore, and not intending to, feels that she cannot disclose her best and most likely idea on the subject.

"Any other reason for their mention of his name would be more probable than the one you choose to imagine."

"Yes, I dare say, but one cannot control their own thoughts, and I never take a philosophical view of things, like you do."

Miss Cubley looks triumphant at this open admission of her success in argument.

"What I say is right, you may depend, my dear. You see it is utterly incompatible with common sense to suppose that Mr. Rupert could be mixed up or connected in any shape or form with people such as you describe these to have been. From what you say, they might be anything, from bull-fighters to robbers, and how can he have had any dealings with men of such a stamp?"

"What I fear is that they may be the tools of others; besides, one was rather handsome, from the glimpse I had of his face."

"Well, all I can say is this; for you to imagine that they can have any evil design towards him seems to me simply absurd."

"You see, you don't know all."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes; or you would change your opinion perhaps."

"Then why don't you tell me?"

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"Because it would not be right of me; I should be betraying a confidence."

"Then, my dear, if you cannot trust me, I wash my hands of the whole matter," says Miss Cubley, smoothing away imaginary wrinkles from the skirt of her dress and reddening with vexation at finding herself after long years of faithful servitude not completely in Clarice's confidence.

The afternoon cup of tea is discussed, and even dinner without Miss Cubley regaining her usual equilibrium.

CHAPTER V.

GUIERIELA.

THE next day passes tamely, and yet not free from anxiety to Clarice. The shades of night have deepened once more, and thousands of twinkling stars stud the dark-blue heavens. Inside the "*Fonda del Oriente*," the private sitting-room which Clarice has hired for her own use is occupied by herself and Miss Cubley; lights have been brought which dimly illumine the sombre colouring of the apartment, furnished, as it is, in solid mahogany. Clarice is beginning to think that all hope of hearing anything more of the strange events of yesterday is over, and, perplexed in mind, unhappy and troubled in spirit, she is endeavouring to persuade herself that the conversation she heard could mean no harm to Beauville; she is startled by a hasty rap at the door, and her reverie is broken by the entrance of the satisfied and self-confident form of José Guieriela, for no less a person is announced by the attendant.

Collected and full of assurance, he is at no loss for words, though the presence of a second individual in the shape of Miss Cubley is rather more than he bargained for.

"Lady, I think you desired to speak with me," he says in a villainous mixture of bad Spanish and broken English, made all the more odious by an insolent leer, as if he knows that he is sure of his ground and need fear no repulse.

"Oh! yes, I did; I think that you can furnish me with some information I am desirous to have, and for which I am willing to pay." This last clause in her sentence is rather a facer to Guieriela, who has had the impudence to conceive the idea that he had interested the young English lady, and hence her attempt to address him on the staircase, so the plain language used by Clarice rather floors him, and at once puts an end to his self-conceit. His large prominent ears seem to prick up at the mention of payment, and a look of hungry greed enters his piercing eyes. There is gold to be made, and for it José Guieriela has an intense and insatiable lust, and he knows and feels that, in his inmost soul, no crime, however desperate, would be too great for him to attempt were he but adequately paid.

"And why does the senora think that I can supply her with the knowledge she seeks?" he asks, never for a moment removing his glance from Clarice's face.

"I know you can if you choose."

"But you will not refuse to tell me how you are possessed of that information."

"No; it is simple enough."

"Then——"

"I overheard part of a conversation carried on between you and your two companions." Guieriela's face changes in hue, from that of a deep tawny orange to something approaching a dingy sickly yellow, and a half stifled oath leaves his thin, tightly-clenched lips. Clarice does not fail to see that her shot has sped home, and that he is completely taken aback by her direct statement. As for Miss Cubley, she cannot believe her senses; that Clarice should be talking to a horrible-looking man to whom she never could have been introduced, and who can have no business there, is beyond her altogether; however, she dare not speak, so there is nothing for it but to ply her needle and keep her ears as wide open as possible. Thinking that another random shaft may tell, and longing to strike to the root of the matter so that she may bring the disagreeable interview to an end quickly, Clarice exclaims: "Your conversation this afternoon was about a gentleman of the name of Beauville." Guieriela's manner is confused in the extreme, as he stammers forth:

"True, lady, it was." Clarice is more convinced than ever that her suspicions are correct, or else what reason is there for all this ill-concealed dismay?

"How much of your plans I am acquainted with it is needless to mention."

"You will pardon me, lady; that is precisely what I want to know."

"Then shall I tell you," replied Clarice, feeling that she has nothing to lose and everything to gain by speaking boldly; whether it be all a mere idea of her own or not she will discover more readily than by beating about the bush, and she hates vacillation.

"Some injury is meditated by you and those with you towards this gentleman."

"Well, lady?"

"You acknowledge it?"

"I did not say so."

"Why this fencing? I will give you what money you ask for your intelligence and assistance in enabling me to defeat these plans." Clarice's heart beats fearfully; she feels herself trembling from head to foot, her fears are not groundless, the man she loves is in danger, but her firm and resolute nature asserts itself; she sets her white teeth, and the filbert-shaped nails of her taper fingers press into the rosy palms of her hands as if they would penetrate the skin. Now it so happens that there are a good many conflicting thoughts passing through the fertile mind of José Guiteriela; on the one hand, if he helps this lady, if he tells all he knows, he will be revenged, and amply, upon the man whom above all others he cordially hates, and against whom he bears a grudge, undying and unquenchable. But then others will suffer, and that is scarcely what he wants; he would have wished that this man alone should feel the keen edge of his vengeance. Slowly he ponders it in his subtle brain. Why should he care? What are the others to him? Will they give him gold, and why should he spare them and lose it? He is scarcely a man to be drawn into a corner or to be troubled long by any qualms or scruples of conscience, and rapidly his decision is taken.

"What will you give me, lady, if I make a clean breast of it and tell you everything?"

Clarice rises from her chair and unlocking a Russian leather writing-case, which is lying on the table, pulls out a bulky heap of bank-notes and carelessly tosses them into the greedy Spaniard's hands.

"I will give you twice as much if——"

"I can save the Senor Beauville's life?"

Clarice's throat is parched and dry, she can barely speak; only at this moment does she feel how much she loves this man.

"Save him," she gasps forth in a choked, dry voice. "See here; I will treble, ay, quadruple that if you rescue him from peril."

"It's a bargain, lady."

"Quick, then, tell me everything and what I am to do."

Guieriela looks round over his shoulder to where Miss Cubley is sitting; in a moment Clarice divines the meaning of his glance.

"You do not wish the presence of a third party; you would rather that we were alone?"

"That is it, senora. You see, what I have to say concerns you only," replies Guieriela, with a broad grin which, if possible, adds to the repulsive expression of his face.

Clarice hesitates; she shudders at the idea of being left with this ill-omened visitor; what if he attempt to do her harm and no one near to aid her? He might rob her or commit some violence; she closes her eyes and a nervous tremor passes through her frame; she wavers, but only for an instant; it is for his sake and for him she would brave a thousand dangers. So she signs to Miss Cubley, who quits the room, but only to place herself on the outside as near the keyhole as she can, resolving to rush in to her young mistress's assistance should she hear the slightest cause for alarm.

"Now, tell your tale," says Clarice in a cold constrained voice.

"Well, lady, but before I commence, what guarantee have I that you will pay me four times this sum?"

"My sacred promise, which I have given you; is not that enough? Go on, even while you trifle I may be losing precious time."

Guieriela eyes her strangely; never before in all his life has he believed in any one's word if he could help it; again he looks at her, as pale and proudly beautiful she sits immovable before him, waiting until he should choose to tell his tale; her haughty patrician features show no trace of the anxiety, impatience, and even mental misery to which she is a prey. No, no; those lips *can't* lie, he thinks; he feels that her word to him is as good as if he held the crisp bank-notes in his hand. And then he cannot help thinking that, somehow, had his life been a different one; had he ever known a mother's love, instead of a brutal father's drunken caresses, and oftentimes harsh and cruel kicks, he might have been another man now, instead of the stony-hearted ruffian he feels himself to be, eking out his daily existence by deeds of cruelty and lawless robbery; even now he can recall a time when in his early dawning manhood he too had loved with the full strength of his passionate nature, honestly and truly. Ah! how men would scoff and jeer at him now if he told them that even he had fondly, hopefully, trustfully, looked forward to the coming years, when he should be able to marry his winsome, bright-eyed darling, and live his days with her in some snug white-walled, vine-clad cottage, there to end their days in peace, surrounded by his children, growing up around him honest and good, a comfort to his white hairs, a solace to cheer his downward passage to the shadowy far-off land! And now, now, what has he left? he, an

outlawed ruffian, without the pale of civilization, scorned by all, his steps dogged by officers of justice. And all, all, for a woman who played him false and nipped his young hopes in the bud. Surely, in the hardest heart there is a chord which, could we but touch it, would show itself not quite destitute of the milk of human kindness, and so it is with José Guieriela as he looks upon the face of Clarice and thinks, oh, God! that she is beginning life—what would he not give if he could live his once again? How full of hopes and fears, joys and ambitions, she is, while he is an outcast among men, and it may be he has lost his all with God! The hot salt tears trickle between the fingers of his strong brown hands as he buries his face in them to hide the emotion which he is powerless to restrain; never since his boyhood has *he* shed *tears*, and inwardly he resolves to do at least one good action ere his dark career be ended. He will save the Senor Beauville from the brutal hands of his comrades, come what may, and the loving heart of this fair English lady shall not so soon receive a lasting scar for want of aught that he can do.

"Why, what is wrong? Can I help you?" asks Clarice, who sees the swelling veins in his forehead and the efforts, but ill-concealed, to stifle his emotion. "What is it? Is there anything amiss? Are you ill?"

"Neither, senora. I am ashamed of myself. But to my tale, which I know you long to hear. My chief—for you must know, lady, that, worse luck, I am one of a band of brigands—well, Don Pedro Gonzala—may the Virgin curse him!—is El Capitano. For some reason, best known to himself, he has taken a violent hate to the Senor Beauville, and yesterday afternoon the conference, part of which you overheard, was to devise a scheme for his capture. You see, he has been ill."

"Ill! Rupert Beauville?"

"Yes, senora."

"But he has recovered."

"Partly."

"What has been the matter with him?"

"I know not, lady. Don Pedro thinks that having made love to his pretty sweetheart, Dona Isidiore Carmiera, her refusal is the cause of it. It may be so; a man might be ill for many a worse reason, for Seville cannot boast of fairer form or one more ravishingly beautiful than Dona Isidiore."

"Is she so lovely?"

"She is, indeed, lady, and not by reputation only. But *you* should know the cause of the Senor Beauville's sickness."

"I know nothing," answers Clarice haughtily.

"Well then, lady, to-morrow night—the hour is fixed—our orders are to capture him dead or alive. The house will be surrounded."

"At what time?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Then how do you propose to rescue him?"

"Leave that to me, lady. You will not spare the gold."

"Anything that I have shall go, if need be, to save him."

"Good. Then I will go and confess all to the alcalde. Your money will find a way to his heart if nothing else does; and though he dreads Gonzala you have but to open your purse strings and he would arrest his own mother. He will order a cordon of police to surround the house, strong enough to overpower Gonzala, the others with him, and myself, though, of course, I shall be neutral."

"It would be better that I should see this man, this alcalde."

"As you wish, lady. But, you see, my plans are perfect. Don Pedro Gonzala—whom may the foul fiend take as my worst enemy!—will be captured, and the Senor Beauville saved. And now I will go, lady, believing in your promise. Who knows but that yet I may end my life without having to lie or steal?"

"One moment. You can see the Senor Beauville, and convey into his hands a letter from me."

"You may command me, senora."

Clarice pens a brief but explicit note, acquainting him with all she has heard, and telling him to be on his guard, signing her name at the end, and addressing it to the Senor Rupert Beauville, for her quick brain tells her that he will believe all when he recognizes her handwriting, and forewarned is forearmed.

"Then you will deliver this to him without fail?"

"You may rely on me, senora."

"Then good-night; and may God attend your efforts with success." Guieriela gone, once alone, and Clarice's over-strained system breaks down. Miss Cubley hears a low, hysterical moan, and rushes in to find her prostrate in a dead faint.

CHAPTER VI. AND LAST.

ONE TOO MANY.

WEARY of earth. Weary of life. Destitute of all that makes it worth living; sad, defeated and undone, Rupert Beauville feels himself to be the shadow of his former self. What to the shallow-minded and heartless would have been a chimera, a love but skin deep, to him has been a different matter. Cupid's barbed arrow has struck deep into his confiding and loving nature. Guieriela's words to Clarice were full of truth, for Rupert has been ill; sick of a weary, intermittent fever, aggravated and made all the more incurable because the cause proceeds not from the body but the mind, over-taxed and strained by the shock. And yet in a measure his long journey from Pentrouel, his

lengthened stay in Seville have been successful, for he has positive proof that his brother never raised his hand against himself, never attempted to take his own life. Of that fearful doubt he has been relieved, but only to find that the woman he loves with all his strength cares more for his brother's black-hearted murderer than for himself. One comforting thought, and perhaps the only one, had been his promise, his grand and almost God-like self-denial and mercy, *for her sake* never to seek to injure, never to attempt to bring to justice, *her* lover, *his* rival, and his brother's murderer. To such a man to love is to love *truly*, not with mere cold-blooded conventionality. And so he has sorrowed for Dona Isidore as for one dead, and from whom he is for ever parted. To-night, as he sits alone, strangely calm, he determines to leave Seville as soon as possible. In another day or so he will feel fit for the journey. "That is the only thing for me to do, leave this place without delay," he says to himself. "I shall have no further use for this thing," he adds, as he picks up a small six-chambered Colt. "*L'homme propose et Dieu dispose*. The other night I was very nearly trying its effect upon myself. And all for love of a woman. I want something to brace me up, change of scene, anything to make me forget the past, *bury* it. Heavens! how I wish I could! Nothing will cheer me like a sight of the old place. Though I fear even the breezy cars of dear old Cornwall will scarcely do that now. However, anything is better than remaining here, so I will write at once and tell them to expect me. I shall get a welcome at Pentrouel. Poor Clarice; she must have been horribly dull all this time, cooped up in a country house, and, egad, I have never written to her for weeks." While he has been holding this conversation with himself, for want of some one better to talk to, he has puffed great clouds of Turkish from his dearly-cherished meerschaum, his dumb friend. The "blue wreaths" of fragrant scented smoke soothe his restless brain. Seating himself at a low writing table which is littered with papers, tell-tale evidences of an unanswered correspondence, he begins to write. He can only pen a few lines, his thoughts *will* not come, but it is to Clarice and she will understand him. He has directed it and is in the act of sealing it when a heavy footstep resounds in the passage, and the next instant the door is rudely flung open, a powerfully built man, masked and armed to the teeth, stands at the entrance.

"The Senor Rupert Beauville?"

"Yes, I am he. But I have yet to learn by what right you dare to enter this house?"

"To arrest you," is the answer. There is a hissing sneer of hate in the man's voice. "You are my prisoner, Senor Beauville; dead or alive, I care not which."

It is all the work of an instant to Rupert; his pulse throbs madly, but he is perfectly cool. His life is attempted, but if lost

it shall be dearly bought. The revolver is lying in front of him on the table; it is the work of a moment to raise it and fire. The tall muffled figure of his foe rushes towards him as if to grapple with deadly intent, but with a terrible moan of mingled agony, baffled vengeance and undying hate, he rolls headlong to the ground. His broad-brimmed sombrero falls off, and with it the silken mask, revealing the pallid countenance of Don Pedro Gonzala. Rupert had fired at random, with no wish to kill, but merely in self-defence and with the intention of crippling his opponent, but as he springs towards the prostrate figure he sees that his shot has taken fatal effect. Bending over him, he raises the head of the stricken man gently in his arms, forgetful of all else save the terrible thing he has done, heedless that an instant before the form now apparently bereft of life had quivered with angry passion and bitter hate against himself. With a touch soft as a woman's he turns the face so that the dim rays of the lamp fall on it. One glance is enough. With a cry of horror he starts back.

"God in heaven! my brother's murderer!" he shrieks.

With his face buried in his hands he tries to shut out the sight which recalls so vividly his hateful dream. The loud tones of Rupert's voice awaken the last spark of dying energy in Pedro Gonzala. With a mighty effort, which causes the blood to well in a crimson stream from his wound, he raises himself on his elbow.

"Madre de Dios! I am dying!" he gasps. "Senor Beauville, come close—nearer still." His eyes gleam with a fiendish glare of baffled hate and undying resentment, and as Rupert stoops over him he hisses out, as he struggles for breath:

"Yes, yes. El Diavolo!—the pain! My words will give you comfort. I curse you, as I cursed him. I murdered him, as I would have rid myself of you, for—for her sake."

The blood and foam curdle on his thin cruel lips, his eyes roll fearfully in their sockets, and with a moan of anguish he falls back dead. Shouts and cries, the dull thud of heavy feet re-echo through the house, but Rupert heeds them not; he kneels beside the dead, and as he scans the livid features, the firm-clenched hands, his thoughts go back to his brother. He writhed beneath the iron grip of those cruel fingers, and with none to aid and none to hear, save God. Poor brother, what a blighted life had been his! His boyish days embittered, his hopes and ambitions shattered, no peace, no rest on earth; his end sudden and awful. No thoughts of satisfied revenge fill Rupert's breast as he looks upon the lifeless clay before him. What of the woman he had loved, and to whom he had passed his sacred word never to injure her lover—what of her?"

"She loved him," he mutters, "and for her sake I would have wished it otherwise. I would have spared him; even had I known who he was he was safe from me. No earthly lust for vengeance

or hate of him would have made me break my promise, but," and his voice sinks into a low, solemn whisper, "it was God's will." No sounds have caught his ear; wrapt in his own feelings he has forgotten all save the rigid form before him and his lost love. He is about to rise from his kneeling position when his shoulders are grasped by strong hands; he turns, and as he sees the room and doorway blocked with armed men, his old Cornish pluck returns; regardless of the odds, he levels one tremendous blow with his clenched fist at his nearest assailant. The next instant he is overpowered and lying helpless on the floor.

"El Demonio! he has shot the Senor Capitano."

"Dead as a door nail," says another bronzed ruffian, as he stoops over Gonzala's body.

"He shall swing."

"Run your knife through him."

"No, no!"

"He is rich; besides, he has rid us of a plague worse than the devil himself."

"This way with him."

"Quick."

"To the door if we want to make good our escape." A sound catches Rupert's ears, and the faces of his captors blanch white with terror.

"Retreat is cut off that way."

"Leave him."

"Come on." In another instant, by every possible means of exit, through the windows into the moonlit patio, helter-skelter, bent only on effecting their retreat, his assailants have vanished, all save one. In a state of bewilderment Rupert hears rapid shots, cries for quarter, the clang of steel; bound, gagged, and helpless, the whole scene passes before him like some wild phantasmagoria of overheated brain and distended fancy. It changes again. The apartment is filled with the burly, bearded forms of the alguazils. The police have come to the rescue. He is saved. Another moment he is released from his fetters unharmed. The letter intrusted to Guieriela is placed in his hands; too late to be of use as a warning, but in time to acquaint him with the fact that he owes his life to Clarice Polwurth.

* * * * *

Time has fled. Children's sweet merry laughter rings through the old walls of Pentrouel Court. Two figures have reached the summit of the lofty cliffs above the tiny fishing village, and together they linger, watching the brown-sailed fishing craft and the glorious golden summer sun sinking below the distant line of dark blue ocean. Thinking of other years, of the vanished past, they stand, but all their hopes and fears, sorrows and mirths, are blended. For they are one.

THE END.

LIFE AND DEATH.

I LOVE thee,—and this sad strange thing called Life
Is only *life* to me when thou art near.
If thou wert with me, Death could be but sweet,
For perfect love must cast away all fear.

Belovéd, when thou goest far away,
Life changes into Death: the path I tread
Is shadow'd o'er with phantoms, dark and grim;
And hope all wan with tears of grief is fled.

But if thou stay with me Death has no power;
He cannot harm me, cannot give me pain;
Thine hand in mine, thine arm upholding me,
To bid farewell to earth could be but gain.

Is Love then limited? Is it for thee,
And thee alone, I live, and work and dream?
I cannot tell, I only know I love,
And things are never, never, what they seem.

HELEN B. MAY.

TOO SMART.

By PENFOUND CRAWFORD,

AUTHOR OF "SWEET NELLIE," "RAMBLES IN THE BASSES PYRENEES,"
"BROKEN MUSIC," ETC., ETC.

"A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue
Of him that makes it."

"Love's Labour Lost," Act v. Scene 2.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRIORY GROUNDS.

TOTTIE had many and many a time been warned with regard to the unruly member. But somehow—*how* she never could explain—she was always making people wince, pressing where the shoe pinched regardless of who might wear it. And yet she never meant it; she would have done anything rather than cause pain. Only everything that came within the range of her keen wit had a ludicrous side for Tottie, and quick as she was to perceive this, she was equally quick in communicating her smart ideas to those around her. The stinging little words were uttered with such ingenuous innocence as added much to their poignancy. The large grey-green eyes and somewhat wide mouth flashed with merriment over her own *bon mots*.

On the very afternoon when we first see her, Tottie was predestined to make one of her telling retorts—one which was long unforgotten, and which will—by those most interested—never be forgotten.

The sun was shining brilliantly, as he had so often shone this beautiful Jubilee summer. Scarcely a leaf of the grand old chestnuts in the Priory grounds stirred, so soft and gentle was the light breeze. But notwithstanding the heat every court had its complement of tennis players, while the seats beneath the trees were filled with ladies, and many were the men who leaned against the chestnuts' giant trunks.

"'Five all,' and your 'service,' Miss Tottie," declared young Tom Brett, sending her the balls.

"Tottie's face is as red as her hair," soliloquized her father—as she picked them up.

Colonel Tempest, late of the Madras Infantry, was aggrieved at Providence for the colour of his daughter's ample locks. Although, why he should have expected to escape the consequence of his own selection of a red-haired woman for his wife it would be difficult to say. But in marrying, the then dashing young cornet—there were cornets in those days—had considered the past and not the future. The father of Margaret Mary McClane had freed him from an incubus of debt. But alas! how brief that period of freedom had been. Gerald Tempest was one of those unfortunate beings to whom it is impossible to keep their heads above water. First came the necessity to exchange into an infantry regiment going to India, then into the Madras Infantry. In this corps he contrived to remain his period of service. Two years previous to the time of which I speak, he had returned to England and settled down at Holchester with his two daughters. His wife lay buried in an Indian grave. The two children favoured either parent.

"Euphemia," he proudly told his friends, "is—as far as a girl can be—what I was

' When I first put my uniform on,
And every beauty found it her duty,

&c., &c.," with a contemptuous wave of the hand.

Over Tottie he sighed,

"She reminds me of poor Margaret Mary. Ah! Tottie, if you only had her money as well as her face."

"You'd spend it," was the quick retort.

"Euphemia, will any one be found to marry my red-haired daughter?"

"Your red-haired daughter does not want to marry. When the Prince comes to carry off our beauty, the ugly duckling will stay at home with her dad."

"No, you must marry, but," with the hauteur that became Gerald Tempest even in poverty, "plain as you are you shall never marry a doctor, a paymaster, or a marine."

"Deuce," simultaneously from the quartette in Tottie's court.

"Vantage in," as she serves a ball that never rises.

Her colouring is indeed brilliant as she crosses to the left court and again serves, but less successfully.

"One fault," cries Tom.

She gives an easy one, and a good "rally" follows.

It is "deuce" again.

The game vacillates. Many minutes are spent in the contest, but at length Tottie and her partner, Jonathan Howard, win.

As she stops, beaming and breathless, Euphemia and Tom come round the "net" and join them.

They cannot have another "set," however much they may desire to do so. The courts are in such demand; it has been ruled by the committee that at the conclusion of each "set" the players vacate in favour of other members.

"A wandering minstrel I,
A thing of shreds and patches,"

murmurs Tom, in unison with the band that is playing near the centre of the picturesque old gardens.

"A thirsty game, that," declares Jonathan; "who's for the tent and tea?"

"Everybody who has seven senses."

"That's nobody, Mr. Brett; nevertheless I am going;" and they all follow Tottie.

"Shall I get you some tea, Miss Tempest?" asks Jonathan.

"Yes, if you please, and—

'Mix it with sawdust and treacle and ink,
And anything else that is *pleasant* to drink,'"

amended Tottie.

"I beg your pardon?" very gravely.

"O nothing," returning his stolid stare. "What a fool that man is, Mia! I wonder you can stand him."

"I wish you would not talk nonsense," said her sister, with a slight frown. "When you know he cannot see a joke, why——"

"See a joke, I should think not; his brains are as tough as his father's leather."

There was a laugh among the men who had gathered round the two sisters, and the hand that was bringing Euphemia's tea shook until it spilt half the contents of the cup, and Jonathan returned to the table for more. To understand the gist of the jest it should be known that Jonathan Howard, senior, was a leather merchant reputed to be worth some twenty thousand a year.

"I'll be even with that little spit-fire," determined Jonathan, as he handed Euphemia the replenished cup.

And, as fate would have it, it was not long before Tottie's tongue enabled him to be "even with her."

"Looking forward to the ball, Miss Tottie?" suggested Tom Brett, who was feasting on macaroons.

"Rather."

"Tottie, Tottie," corrected her sister, and then asked of the group of men around, "Are many of you going?"

"They are all going to this ball, I know," broke in Tottie, with a sagacious nod of her bright head.

"You know more than any one else, then," said Tom; "how do you know that we are all going?"

"Because," and Tottie can hardly speak for laughter, "there is nothing to pay."

CHAPTER II.

THE "SUFFOLK SPANKERS."

Sebastian.—"Look, he's winding up the watch of his wit.
By and by it will strike."

"The Tempest."

THE conversation in the ante-room of the mess of the Suffolk Spankers was animated and angry. Miss Tottie Tempest's remark was under discussion.

That a little red-headed girl should say—in the tent of the public gardens—that the Suffolk Spankers would all attend a ball where there was nothing to pay, and for the reason that there was nothing to pay, was an indignity not to be stood. And the Suffolk Spankers were not going to stand it. Things were coming to a pretty pass when it was possible that such a remark could be made in allusion to the members of so crack a corps.

Tom Brett—he was the last-joined subaltern—sat nursing his knee in silent misery.

"You should make your sweetheart set a watch before the doors of her lips," sneered Jonathan, who—from the depths of the most luxurious chair in the room—kept fanning the anger of his brother officers.

"It's all your fault," declared Tom, aggrieved. "They," jerking his head in the direction of the committee—which had been formed to pass sentence of condign punishment on luckless Tottie Tempest—"would never have taken the words of a girl like that seriously. You know how she always rattles on—scarcely knowing what she says, and never meaning any harm."

"She should keep a civil tongue—impudent little hussy!"

"You've felt the rough side, no doubt," with a laugh, "and so you are taking a manly vengeance. Just what one would expect of you," and, under his breath, I am sorry to say, he added, "mean sneak."

All this banter had been carried on in a low tone—not so low, however, but that a jovial old gentleman behind a newspaper—to all appearance asleep—heard every word. An old gentleman whose countenance those who run may read. No soldier this, but a clergyman of the old school, who rode and shot; an angler and a huntsman, riding to hounds in his old-fashioned bottle-green swallow-tail coat with its shining brass buttons, swearing a little, I am afraid, and very penitent when his wrath went down,

long before the sun. But, I think, even this will be forgiven the Rev. Matthew Brett—rector of Averton-Coombe, Devonshire—for if he committed these sins openly, they will be more than outweighed, when all hearts are laid bare, by the good deeds which he did in secret.

All things concerning Tom were of moment to him. Tom was his nephew, and the Rev. Matthew was a bachelor; he was staying a week with Tom, and being made much of by the brother officers, who considered him a most entertaining character.

"I shall report you if you are impertinent," said Jonathan, at Tom's last remark—for the way it was said, even more than the words, roused his temper.

"Report away—it's a shame to get the jolliest little girl in Holchester into a row."

"Well, gentlemen," began the speaker of the committee, rising and clearing his throat as he addressed the whole room, "it has been decided that it is impossible to overlook the insulting remark made this afternoon in the Priory gardens, by Miss Tottie Tempest. It is impossible to expect that such a regiment as the Suffolk Spankers should for an instant permit so injurious a remark to pass unnoticed."

"Hear! hear!" and rappings on the table or the arms of chairs, according to the position of those who applaud.

Tom, with his elbows on his knees, and his sun-burnt face between his hands, maintains a dissatisfied silence.

The Rev. Matthew's eyes are still closed; but there are signs of amusement in the twitching of the many wrinkles around the mouth. He has a keen sense of humour.

"Gentlemen, the honour of the corps demands that we inflict chastisement on the offender. And let us regard the statement made by this young person, viz., Miss Tottie Tempest, in another light. That is to say in the light of truth. And we find that the range of Miss Tottie's tongue is in no wise limited by the bounds of veracity. Her assertion that the officers of the Suffolk Spankers prefer to attend a ball when there is nothing to pay is incorrect."

Great applause.

"Gentlemen, I am a member of the distinguished corps in question—I am proud of it, gentlemen. As such I should be acquainted with the character of the corps, and I assure you that I have never known one of my brother officers save a shilling when he could spend it."

Much laughter, in which the speaker loses his dignity so much as to join.

"Their conduct in this direction has been unflinchingly brave—I mean in the direction of spending many shillings that they had better have saved. I have known them so lavish of their money that they have driven in hansoms and drank champagne,

with a purse that you might turn inside out and not drop any coin of the realm. But," and the raised voice is solemnly lowered, "this is a course that I would advise none of my brother officers to follow. It leads to exile in a foreign land, if not to the sheathing of the sword for ever. Any way we mourn their loss, and the old regiment knows them no more."

"Bravo!"

"Didn't know you could come the pathetic."

"Very affecting—but come to the point."

"Yes, yes, the sentence, pass the sentence!"

"Give me time, gentlemen. I was bound to prove for the general satisfaction that whether the officers of the Suffolk Spankers were men with money or without money, they were all equal to spending money."

"Go on."

"Then"—ignoring the interruption—"although the advocate for the defendant has urged the youth of the culprit, likewise the peculiar unruliness of her tongue, we must punish. Our sentence is a lenient one, gentlemen, for what is justice unless it is tempered with mercy? We hereby declare," pompously, "that any officer of this regiment who dances with Miss Tottie Tempest to-morrow evening commits an offence against the other members that must be expiated by his treating the whole mess to champagne on the following night."

"What! nobody dance with that jolly little fuzzy-headed girl I saw you talking to, Tom?" cried the Rev. Matthew, springing upright in his chair, and looking like a cock about to crow.

"Not one of us, sir," answered the speaker.

"Then, begad! I will. We'll go into the town to-morrow morning, and buy white kids and a button-hole, and I'll show whether I can foot it or not!"

" 'First the heel and then the toe—
One, two, three!'"

And he revolved in an airy manner that sent all present into roars of laughter.

"Well done, sir!"

"Well done the Church!"

"I hope I may be able to do as much when I am your age, sir!" came the comments from either side.

" 'Froggie would a-wooing go,
Whether his mother would let him or no.
Heigho! says Roly.'"

I mean to cut you out, Tom; so I'm off to bed, to get some beauty-sleep. Good night, young gentlemen."

"Well, Howard, are you satisfied now that you have spoiled that poor little girl's ball for her?" asked Tom, savagely.

"No," growled Jonathan, "I do not think that we should any of us ever speak to her again."

"I tell you what," and Tom's face brimmed over with merriment; "it would be a terrible blow to her if——"

"What?" eagerly.

"You kept to that, for your own part."

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPENSIVE VALSE.

"Gather, therefore, the rose whilst yet is prime,
For soon comes age that will her pride deflowre:
Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,
Whilst loving thou mayst loved be with equal crime!"
SPENSER.

"WHAT! Mr. Brett, my dear old friend! This is a pleasant surprise!" exclaimed an attenuated elderly lady, advancing from the midst of her three daughters; and clasping one of the Rector's plump hands in both her own immediately on his entering the Corn Exchange of Holchester, where the residents were giving a ball to the garrison.

"How do you do, Mrs. Lumsden? How are you? And how are the young ladies?"

As the Rev. Matthew shook hands all round he was conscious of the entrance of Colonel Tempest and his two daughters. The eyes of all present were irresistibly attracted by the trio.

"That is a lovely girl, that Miss Tempest," commented Mr. Brett.

"And to think what her mother was!" murmured Mrs. Lumsden, growing green with jealousy as her own plain offspring remained unnoticed while the dancing men were already surrounding the new arrivals.

"What!" innocently, "was Miss Tempest's mother even more beautiful than her daughter?"

"Oh, no," wondering at the obtuseness of men; "the late Mrs. Tempest's father was a tobacconist; he had a little shop in Edinburgh, where he managed to make a fortune. Colonel Tempest, then a cornet, was stationed at Portobello. Not knowing which way to turn for money, he married old McClane's daughter, spent her money, and broke her heart."

"Dear, dear! very sad! Excuse me, Mrs. Lumsden, I must get a dance with those girls before their cards are full. Tom," laying hold of his nephew, who was passing by him, "introduce me to Miss Tottie Tempest."

Tom obeyed, speaking in a most funereal voice, and then—without another word—turned on his heel.

Mr. Brett shook with suppressed laughter as his eyes watched Tottie's disconsolate face.

"How have I offended Tom?" she wondered, forgetting the burly clergyman.

"Miss Tottie."

"Yes," looking up in surprise.

"Will you take my arm, and walk away from the crowd? I have something to tell you—a secret."

"I would rather not; I have a headache; I—I am tired."

"Tired before the ball begins? Nonsense. When you have heard my secret you won't be half so tired."

"If it is a secret you had better not tell it me; I never could keep one," raising her large, candid eyes.

"I think you will keep this one."

"What is it about?" asked Tottie, a little curiously.

"Tom."

One of the first couples to commence waltzing, as the music from the "Mikado" floated merrily through the rooms, was the Rector and Tottie. And oh! how different she looks now from what she did before hearing the secret. That must have been a magical secret that the old Rector had whispered in her little rosy ear!

Jonathan Howard is dancing with Euphemia. Jonathan keeps step, and he keeps time, but there is something aggressive—the stamp of the *parvenu*—in all he does.

When he has resigned his beautiful partner to her father he joins Tom, who is leaning against one of the pillars at the end of the ball-room. The band plays in the balcony above, and the chaperones sit on the sofas and easy chairs behind Tom.

"Not dancing?"

"No, thanks to you."

"What have I to do with it?"

"Everything; it was all your doing that *they* barred our dancing with Tottie."

"There are loads of other girls."

"There are loads of other girls—but I don't want 'em."

"I did not know you were so hard hit."

"Don't you think I might dance just once with her?" wistfully, disregarding Jonathan's last speech.

"Well, my dear fellow," squaring himself in front of Tom and lowering his voice, "you know the penalty and whether you can pay for it—champagne all round at mess to-morrow night. Being an interested person I should advise you to dance with her—I like champagne, especially when some one else pays for it. You know the price, but of course the girl's worth it—if she's worth anything to you she's worth risking the world for."

"Only, not being Mark Antony I have not a world to risk."

"Sorry I can't help you there;" and Jonathan went in search of his next partner.

But Tom was not to be left in peace.

"Come, Tom, I want a chat with you;" and Mr. Brett, thrusting his arm within Tom's, drew him across the ball-room, out at the door, through the passage beyond—crowded as it was with couples seated among shrubs and below dim lanterns—out at the door further, into the street, where they found themselves alone.

"And now," began the elder gentleman, "I have one or two questions to ask you. Firstly: Do you not think that I should marry and settle down?"

An exclamation burst from Tom.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"All right, my dear boy. I am a little strong in my language sometimes. I am always sorry afterwards. It is a mistake, but not always to be avoided. God forgive us! Now answer my question."

"Well, sir, I thought you had settled down long ago. And I never thought that anything would induce you to allow a woman (I have heard you say this) to manage your house."

"But I never was in love until now."

"In love! You! With whom?"

"Miss Tottie Tempest."

"What, my little Tottie!" This broke from Tom involuntarily, and a dash of deep tenderness thrilled his voice.

"You want to dance with her very much to-night—how much would the champagne cost to-morrow?" Then, without waiting for an answer, "I was going to give you a cheque before I went; it shall pay for the champagne dinner."

"Oh! uncle——"

"There, go along, you rogue; no thanks! What a pleasant little woman she will be to have always at the rectory!"

"But do you really mean to marry her?"

"Do you think Colonel Tempest will give her to me?"

"They are so poor, I think he would give his daughters to any one who could keep them."

"I shall ask him to-morrow, but say nothing of this to the little body."

They were silent; and in the silence the deep melodious notes of "Estudiantina" reached them.

"She is waiting for you, Tom."

"Uncle Matthew, you are too old to marry Tottie."

"I am at least old enough to judge for myself. Go and dance."

And as Tom obeyed the Rev. Matthew reflected:

"I am old, with money; he is young, with a heartache; whose shoes are the more pleasant to wear?"

In the ball-room Tottie and Tom are revelling in the delight of the moment.

"I *have* enjoyed that dance, Miss Tottie," as he stopped with the last bar of the band; "I should, for it cost me a big cheque."

"Oh! then carrots is riz!"

CHAPTER IV.

UNLESS.

"Unless you can think, when the song is done
No other is sweet in the rhym.
Unless you can feel when left by one
That all men else go with him.
Ah, never call it loving."

"I AM off to call on Colonel Tempest, Tom," remarked Mr. Brett—after a late breakfast—the next morning.

"You are in a great hurry, sir!"

"Perhaps, Tom. Things cannot be delayed at my time of life. Any message for our little Tottie?"

Tom's face grew even longer than it was before. He did not relish sharing *his* Tottie.

"You would rather carry your own messages, eh? Come round and tell her all you have to say about one o'clock."

No answer.

"It will be more lively at the rectory when you come to stay—with Tottie there."

Still no response.

"If you had entered the Church you might have been thinking of marrying. You would have been so much better off. Two livings at my death, and all my money—whereas now the livings will go to a distant cousin, and I shall leave my money ——"

"To your widow."

A comical smile passed across the Rev. Matthew's jovial countenance; but Tom was looking moodily at the remains of his breakfast; substantial remains, for he had no appetite.

"Have you ever regretted your choice of the army, Tom?"

"Never—I am devoted to my regiment. But . . . if I could have foreseen things, I might have done differently."

"Too late now, I am afraid. Come to the Tempests for me at one o'clock."

A half-an-hour later saw the Rev. Matthew closeted with Colonel Tempest. He startled the latter by the rapid way in which he plunged into the object of his visit. He began:

"I am in love with your charming daughter, sir."

“Meaning Euphemia, Miss Tempest, of course?”

“By no means of course, quite the contrary—I refer to Miss Tottie.”

“God bless my soul!” quite taken aback, “you astonish me, sir.”

“I must be candid with you, Colonel Tempest. I am an old bachelor. They say every Jack has his Jill—well, sir, I never found mine ——”

“Until now?”

“Grant me a patient hearing, sir. It is too late for me to find a mate now—but I think I see two others who are cut out for each other, and if I can help to bring them together I mean to do so. A day or two since your second daughter, Miss Tottie, made a most injudicious remark with reference to the officers of the Suffolk Spankers ——”

“Poor Tottie’s tongue—it’s as fiery as her hair, poor child!”

“I like it, sir; its smartness is delightful after the platitudes of most women.”

“You do not appreciate the sex?”

“My dear sir,

‘Women are like Jeremiah’s figs,
The good are very good indeed,
The bad ——’”

with a deprecating shake of the head,

“‘too sour for pigs.’”

But to resume. Miss Tottie so offended the regiment, that they declared that any officer dancing with her at the ball should treat the regiment to a champagne dinner to-night. Seeing how unhappy this decision rendered Tom I was anxious to discover its effects on Tottie—pardon me, *Miss Tottie*—and when I found that the fact of Tom’s not dancing with her spoilt all her pleasure in the entertainment, why I put two and two together and made four, viz.: I said to myself, these young people have more than a passing fancy for each other—there is love in their hearts.”

The rector’s voice grew husky, he paused, coughed, drew out his handkerchief—the size of a small table-cloth—and blew his nose.

“D—— it all, sir! We have been young. When I was Tom’s age—well, well, that is long past, but if I had had some one to help me then I should not be the grumpy old bachelor I am to-day.” Scarcely a pause, a slight hesitation, and he pursued, “My nephew and your daughter are very young, too young to marry for a year or two. But, Colonel Tempest, I want you to give me your daughter—I want her to come and live with me, keep house at the rectory. I have long wished Tom to enter the Church—

I think now he will do so. And when he has taken orders I shall give Tottie her dowry, and they shall be married."

"Mr. Brett, you are generosity itself. I have nothing to give my children. And to have such a home offered to the one for whom I feared mostly affects a parent's heart very much; it does indeed, sir," and the old colonel's eyes grew moist.

"You accept my offer?"

"Most gratefully."

"Then ——"

A knock at the door, and a servant—a wretched little maid-of-all work—announced:

"Mr. Tom Brett is in the parlour."

Tom found Tottie in the parlour, busily mending stockings. Euphemia was still asleep.

"You are never idle, Miss Tottie," after the usual salutation.

"How can I be? The family cannot go with holes at their toes, and there is no one else to put a stitch in anything."

"What a good wife you would make a poor man!"

"Oh, no one will ever want to marry me—Mia will marry, and I shall take care of dad——always," with a laugh. "Fancy any fellow wanting my red head as a constant *vis-à-vis*!"

"I know some one who wants it."

"I expect he is too young to know what is good for him," bending a blushing face over her work.

"No, he is not young—he is old."

"Old! I love all old men."

"A strange taste," huffily.

"I am 'quite gone' on your uncle. He is a darling. I wonder if you will ever grow as nice," regarding his face attentively, and thinking within her heart what a brave bright face it was, while she affected to despise it.

"You won't have such good eyes by the time I do."

"No, I shall be a prim old maid in spectacles."

"You won't be an old maid," said Tom decidedly, as he thought of the matrimonial arrangements that were even now going forward on her account, "but I shall be an old bachelor—because," rising from the chair he had taken and returning her gaze with resolute flaming eyes, "if I cannot marry the one girl in the world whom I want to marry I shall marry no one. That girl knows she has my heart, and if she tosses it aside——no one shall pick it up—there!"

"Tom!" starting impetuously to her feet, capsizing her basket of stockings and sending cottons, thimble, and scissors to strew the floor, "there is one man in this world for whom I care—and," with half a sob, "if he won't love me, I—I"—she was fairly crying now—"I'll hate everybody."

Tom caught her in his arms, and she was sobbing on his breast, when their respective uncle and father entered.

“Tom !”

“Tottie !”

They move apart, and raise flushed, love-lit faces.

“Uncle, I could not help it.”

“Father, do not be angry.”

“My dear children,” began Mr. Brett, with a smile that appeared perfectly angelic to them both, “do not be afraid of us. Tom,” laying a kind hand on his shoulder, “it is for you I have asked for Tottie.”

He felt the young man’s whole frame quiver beneath his grasp, as he continued :

“Years ago, when I was just your age, I loved such another,” looking towards Tottie, “and I am acting as I am to-day to save you from the loneliness of my solitary to-morrow.”

THE LADY CLERK.

By PERCY REEVE.

MR. HORATIO COCKLES sat in his private office at 175, Chaffinch Lane, feeling in the worst of tempers. He had just transacted some very unpleasant business. He had been compelled to give a month's notice to his managing clerk, who, though he had enjoyed his employer's confidence for many years, had latterly become so addicted to drink and so slovenly in his work, that even easy-going Mr. Cockles was compelled to admit that "a change" was desirable. It was half-past three o'clock, and "Americans" had come very flat. Suddenly a clerk entered, and presented a card, which bore the simple legend:

"Miss Simpson."

"Wishes to see you on business," said the man with an ill-concealed sneer. He little thought that she would be accorded an interview, but Miss Simpson had been peremptory.

Mr. Cockles, under ordinary circumstances, would as soon have thought of admitting a Sister of Mercy intent on collecting subscriptions, or the venerable nuisance who sold steel pens, as Miss Simpson, in whom he by no means scented a client. But to-day he felt desperate, and, with a reckless gesture, he said, "Oh! show her in."

When Miss Simpson entered, he at once perceived that she was very good-looking. But he waited for her to speak first, which she did as follows:

"I have called upon you, sir, with the view of obtaining, if possible, a situation as clerk. For three years I have been governess in a gentleman's family, and from him you will obtain any references that you may require. I have the habit of application to work and some knowledge of book-keeping. Should you feel disposed to give me a trial, I shall endeavour, with some confidence of success, to give you satisfaction."

Mr. Cockles was impressed in spite of himself. The lady was attractive, and he already felt his ill-humour vanishing. He had discharged a clerk that morning, and unquestionably there was a vacancy in his office. Why should he not give this young person a trial and advance the staff a step? Then he looked at the fair applicant again, and, after a short conversation, Miss

Simpson retired on the understanding that if her references were satisfactory, she would hear from Mr. Cockles again.

One week later Miss Simpson was installed in a subordinate position.

Years rolled on, and she had gradually worked her way up. She now occupied a post of some importance, and the exemplary way in which she fulfilled her duties put to silence any jealousy which might otherwise have been felt among her colleagues of the sterner sex. Indefatigable and calm, she supervised every bargain; and she evinced a peculiar alacrity in collecting "differences" from doubtful customers at an early hour on each settling day. Mr. Cockles was enchanted. Never had he made a better investment than when he engaged Miss Simpson at a modest wage. She was so pretty, too. He was not a "marrying man," but what was he to do? Everything seemed to point to an even closer connection than had hitherto subsisted between himself and his interesting *protégée*. One fine afternoon he rang his bell and desired Miss Simpson to step into the sanctum.

"I have been thinking," said the sole partner, "that you have shown yourself worthy of the confidence I reposed in you. You have been faithful as a clerk, and I now ask you to be my wife."

"I would help you to keep the business together," replied Miss Simpson blushing, and with her eyes on the ground.

Mr. Cockles was enraptured. And the more he gazed on the lady before him, the more he felt that it was impossible he could have made a mistake; and that to him alone, perhaps, of a million men similarly situated, had been vouchsafed the full cup of bliss which at once satisfied his inclination and his cupidity.

It were impious to pry further into the *pros* and *cons* of a marriage thus idyllically arranged. Mr. Cockles, in six weeks, became the husband of one wife, and that lady, *née* Miss Simpson, became not only the partner of his joys and sorrows, but also his business partner, which was very much more to the point. And the profits multiplied as month succeeded month; Mrs. Cockles was assiduous in her attendance, and seemed imbued with an almost mannish disregard for merely "home comforts," provided she could make money in the City. Meanwhile her husband was feeling as though a holiday might do him good. He had not taken one for some years, principally because he hardly dared to leave his office. But things were changed now. With his own flesh and blood, with Mrs. Cockles, *née* Simpson, to manage affairs in his absence, what need was there for him to worry about such a trifle? So he accepted an invitation to Scotland, and signed a power of attorney in favour of his wife.

During the first few days of the good gentleman's vacation, letters came pretty regularly; they embodied a flattering amount of affection, and always concluded with the prices of such stocks

and shares as the firm happened to be interested in. But suddenly these advices ceased, and after a week in Caithness without any sign from Chaffinch Lane, Mr. Horatio Cockles began to feel uneasy. On the eighth day he received a telegram. Not from his wife, but from a male clerk. He hurried home as enjoined by the despatch, and found the office in the utmost confusion. To begin with, a month's salary was owing all round. Mrs. Cockles was not to be found; no more was the cashier. But the lady had left a note for her husband. In it she frankly confessed that she had made off to America with all the money she could realize on account of the firm, and that she was accompanied by the cashier. She concluded by saying: "But you will, I am sure, hardly care to prosecute your own wife, even if you could find her, which you cannot. Old man, I fear you must begin again!"

"GEORGINA COCKLES (*née* SIMPSON)."

Cockles was ruined.

When last heard of, Mr. Horatio was capering about in a private lunatic asylum with a peacock's feather in his hair, and singing in a desultory sort of way:

"Has any one seen my Mary Anne?"

A LIFE INTEREST.

By MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "AT BAY," "BY WOMAN'S WIT,"
"MONA'S CHOICE," ETC.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REUNION.

MARJORY was indeed pale! Her heart for a second seemed to stand still, and then beat wildly—as the horror and danger of her position displayed themselves before her. What more likely than that Mrs. Morrison should return with her niece, then what a disclosure awaited Mrs. Rennie—and for herself, what shame! A cold shiver shot through her at the idea! She would never stay to be discovered!—better a thousand times tell all to Mrs. Rennie and go!

This was a consequence of her folly she never anticipated. Ought she to warn Ellis?—ought she to permit such a blow to fall unexpectedly on George?—was she to be a trouble and a disgrace to the brother she loved so well?—would the whole story get round to Mrs. Acland? If it did, how she would revel in the power it bestowed to trample and to torture! Why it would be almost better to marry Ellis and escape it all! But, no!—a deep and true instinct whispered *that* would be a life-long misery.

She sat long where Miss Rennie had left her—her elbows on the table, her face buried in her hands. Gradually, the terrible painful confusion of her mind cleared a little; with the pluck natural to her, she strove to think not only what was the best, but, above all, what was the right thing to do. Courage and calmness came to her as she thought. For every one's sake she must keep her secret as long as possible. She could ascertain from Mary Rennie if her aunt was coming to return her visit, and before they met she would tell her story to Mrs. Rennie; she would meet the danger half-way, it was all she could do. Then, if Mrs. Morrison would not leave her home, her daughter might, and she would be equally ready to tell the scandalous story. The only creature with whom she could take counsel was Dick, and with him, only face to face. If she wrote on the repulsive subject, Dick would reply, and there was always the danger of the letter falling into George's hands, who would unhesitatingly read it.

Besides, she scarcely knew where to address him, as he spoke of leaving Fleury St. Jean about the present time.

Indeed, his letters had been few and scanty of late, there was a change of tone in them too, an indescribable constraint since he and Brand had parted after their expedition to Florence. Marjory had noticed it before; now, as she re-read his last two epistles (which she took out in the hope of extracting some consolation from their contents), it appeared more marked than at first. Was Dick forgetting her, or growing indifferent to her joys and sorrows?

Until this thought occurred to her, she did not know how much she depended on his sympathy and counsel. The tears which her alarm, her anticipation of shame had frozen at their fount, melted and flowed freely at the idea of separation or estrangement from Dick. How her heart ached for the sight of him, to hear the sound of his voice. He would surely counsel her for the best, and feel for her as no one else would. He alone knew the real truth of her secret trouble.

She roused herself, bathed her eyes, put away the tea things, and then wrote a few lines to Dick, begging him to let her know what chance there was of seeing him soon—because she had much to tell him, which she must write if he did not come. This letter she sent to Château Fleury—she did not know Brand's address or she would have written to him for information respecting Dick's movements, she only knew that they parted in consequence of Brand having business in London, while Dick returned to Fleury by Lord Beaulieu's wish.

When she had posted this letter she felt calmer and braver, and though George thought her rather quiet and perhaps tired, as it was very warm, he saw nothing unusual in her looks or manner.

The next day was wet, so the project of shopping fell through, and the girls did not meet until the following Sunday, when George and his sister dined, as they often did on the Sabbath, at Craigneish.

After the midday meal Marjory found herself alone with her friend in a shady nook, each armed with a favourite volume. It was too hot to read attentively, and they talked lazily for a while.

"Have you any young cousins in Scotland?" asked Marjory, after a pause.

"The eldest daughter is about my age, but she is gone abroad with her little brother who is very delicate; she will feel strange there, for she is a regular country girl!"

"Then I daresay you will bring your aunt back with you?"

"My aunt! Nothing on earth would induce her to leave home, we have tried and tried in vain to coax her here, for we like her, though she is funny!"

Marjory silently returned thanks for this postponement of the evil day, but she felt it must come; secrets always come out.

Then she taxed her memory as to whether Mrs. Morrison had heard her name ; she rather thought not. When her luggage was forwarded to her in Edinburgh it was addressed to "Mr. R. Cranston;" she hoped, she believed, her name had not been mentioned—she had purposely abstained from putting it on her box at starting. The name of Acland would then bring no associations to Mrs. Morrison's mind when she heard the story of her nephew's rescue. Above all, Marjory would have time to win Mrs. Rennie's esteem and regard before the shameful truth came out—if any esteem and regard would stand such a disclosure.

Still the hopefulfulness of youth suggested everything as possible in the distant future, and Marjory felt more like herself than she had been since she had learned the relationship between Mr. Rennie and Mrs. Morrison.

* * * * *

Forbes Rennie was a frequent visitor, as was natural, to his friends George and Marjory. To the former he was warmly attached, and the latter he treated as a sister ; but it was a brotherliness with a dash of salt—just the dawning recognition of a woman's charm—for Marjory gave herself great airs of seniority. But she was heartily fond of the boy ; something of the gentle sadness which comes from ill-health still hung about him, though the sea voyage remedy had been marvellously efficacious, and he seemed in a fair way to complete restoration. He too was in his father's office. Mr. Rennie considered his eldest son entirely unsuited to business, and wisely gave him his choice of a profession. He was older by several years than his sister, two children who came between them having died in infancy.

Mr. Rennie was very lenient to his youngest boy, letting him off before the ordinary time of closing, and granting him a holiday whenever "Mother asked for it."

"Are you busy writing again?" he exclaimed, coming into Marjory's sitting-room one fine glowing afternoon at the beginning of August. "Why you must be secretary to something! Is it the society for providing straw bonnets for the Hottentots, they were bothering the governor for a subscription to some such thing the other day?"

"No! I wish *I had* a secretaryship," said Marjory, rising and putting her papers together hastily. "Is George with you?"

"No! He is quill driving as hard as he can go, but I have brought my brother to see you. He arrived yesterday. He has stopped outside to speak to old Mammy Stokes—she was his nurse you know! I thought you wouldn't mind if I brought him, Miss Acland?"

"I shall be very happy to see him," returned Marjory, regretting that her hair was probably ruffled, and that she had on her very simplest morning dress of blue checked print ; but pretty

golden brown hair is not the worse for being in slight disorder, and a neatly fitting print frock with a white apron sometimes sets off a figure as well as silks or satins.

Marjory was, however, shy and nervous about meeting strangers, Mary Rennie's startling communication of a few weeks before had given her a shock from which she had not recovered. She wished this stranger had not come.

"And how long does your brother stay?" she asked.

"Oh, for some time; he has asked a brother officer, a chum of his, down here, so he cannot go north until he is gone." Here Forbes went hastily out and shouted, "Jack, I say Jack, don't be all day," returning almost immediately, followed by a tall, red-haired, good-humoured looking young man, very like Mr. Rennie, remarkably well set up and soldierly in air.

"This is George's sister," said Forbes, by way of an introduction, waving his hand towards Marjory.

Captain Rennie bowed and smiled, saying pleasantly, "I am afraid my brother is an indifferent master of the ceremonies, Miss Acland."

"In this elevated position we are above all ceremonies, and generally dispense with them," returned Marjory. "At any rate your sister does, when she kindly comes to tea with me."

"I have just had the pleasure of shaking hands with your brother," resumed Rennie. "I am sure we are all deeply in his debt for saving this youngster at his own expense. My mother was always wrapped up in Forbes."

"I think she is in you all."

"I believe so. And how do you stand Dockborough, Miss Acland? It is rather a beastly hole."

"Oh! I think it a most interesting place. I am quite happy here. I am never tired looking out on the river." She pointed to the open window.

"Yes," rising to look; "there is really a fine view here. I do not think I ever was in these rooms before. Don't you find them awfully high up, especially when people come to call?"

"No one ever does, except Miss Rennie, and sometimes your mother; *that* is always a gala day when she comes."

"By Jove, you must be buried alive! You must be deucedly fond of your brother to leave London and roost here for his sake."

"That depends on the sort of life I had in London. You see my brother—my brothers and myself, have nothing but each other."

"Oh, come Miss Acland, I can't believe that; I suspect you might have a good deal more for the taking." He laughed a light-hearted boyish laugh, in which, without knowing why, Marjory joined. Then they talked in a friendly way for a few minutes, the young officer describing the nuisance of being

quartered in Ireland, as he had been—the nuisance it was to be ordered to quell disturbances; to stand to be pelted with stones and mud by the patriotic population, while a nervous magistrate hesitated to read the Riot Act. Then he reminded Forbes, who had scarcely spoken, that the “mater” would be expecting them, and bowed himself out.

“I say, Forbes,” he exclaimed when they were in the street, “I had no idea that young Acland’s sister would be such stunning good style. She is deucedly pretty into the bargain. What sweet bright eyes she has. I suppose you often find it convenient to pay her a visit? Eh, Master Forbes?”

“Well, you see, I like to show some attention to George’s sister, and——”

“I daresay you do, a good deal of attention,” interrupted his brother; “so should I if I were staying here, and if—but never mind! How comes it that her people let her hide herself away here, and wait on her brother as if she were the daughter of a petty shopkeeper? Who are these Aclands?”

“The father is a lawyer. I fancy they are gentry, but they have a stepmother, and somehow, though Marjory, I mean Miss Acland, never mentions her, I do not think she cares to be at home. Then they are awfully fond of each other—I mean George and Marjory.”

“Marjory? I suppose it is Marjory when you are *tête-à-tête* and Miss Acland before faces, hey! you young scamp.”

“Jack, how can you talk such rubbish,” cried Forbes, colouring with vexation. “I dare not call her Marjory, only hearing George and Mary always say it, it slips out.”

“You *dare* not,” repeated Captain Rennie, laughing with keen enjoyment of the boy’s confusion. “That’s an awful severe sign, my poor chap.”

“Look here, Jack, don’t go on like that before my mother and Mary, it might——”

“Trust me,” interrupted the other again, “I’ll not spoil sport, besides,” more seriously, “it might make things disagreeable for that nice little girl—not so little either. I can tell you, Forbes, my boy, I would try and cut you out if I had not my own affairs to attend to, so make your mind easy.”

Jack Rennie was a good specimen of the average young officer, not very intellectual or refined, but honest, brave, good-natured, with a tolerably high estimate of himself, and had no doubt whatever that he would be acceptable to any woman under the sun, which was not to be wondered at considering he had a most kindly feeling towards them all. To his sister he was the finest gentleman in the world, and he *was* in her world. To his mother he was her darling boy, that was enough.

Mary Rennie was naturally much taken up with her newly arrived brother, so time went slowly for Marjory. It was nearly

three weeks since she had written to Dick Cranston, and he had not yet broken silence. She felt unusually depressed. If he were indifferent to her sorrows and anxieties life would indeed be a desolate wilderness.

Mary was therefore unusually welcome one afternoon when she suddenly made her appearance.

"I suppose you thought I was never coming again," she cried, embracing Marjory effusively; "but I have had a hundred-and-one things to do—and we have been busy preparing for Jack's friend, Mr. Mowbray Delamere."

"I don't fancy you have done much," said Marjory laughing. "Will you have some tea?"

"No, thank you, it is late, and I had some before I came out. You think I am too idle to be of any use, Marjory; but I am very active sometimes."

"I daresay; at all events you are of use to me—it cheers me to see you, for I have felt rather melancholy of late."

"Oh! you dear. I am so sorry. Go put on your hat and come back with me to dinner. Leave word for your brother to come and fetch you; the walk will do him good and you shall drive back——"

"Thank you a thousand times, but——"

"I will take no excuse—I know they will all be delighted to see you. Jack says you are the right sort, and he is accustomed to very nice people. Do come. You need not change your frock—I like that soft grey and the pink 'pussy-cat' tie round your neck; you had that dress from a first-rate milliner, I am sure."

"Yes, I believe so—Aunt Carteret gave it to me. It was my best dress all last summer."

"That is amazing—how is it you manage to keep your clothes?"

"Because I know how difficult it is to replace them!"

"Do get your hat and come."

"Don't you expect Captain Rennie's friend to-day?"

"No; is it not provoking?—Jack had a telegram this morning. He cannot get leave until the 21st. He is so nice and amusing, but rather grand. We saw him when we were up in town last year—the regiment was at Shorncliff then, and was going to give a ball. I would have given anything, my eyes!—to go to it, but father had some horrid business in Manchester, and mother would not go without him—I cried half the evening. Mr. Delamere told me afterwards he wished he had been near to wipe away my tears! What do you think of that? Isn't Mowbray Delamere a beautiful name? I am afraid he will find us humdrum and homely——"

"Did you hear a knock? I thought some one knocked," interrupted Marjory.

"No—I——"

The knock was repeated this time unmistakably. "Come in," cried Marjory.

The door opened slowly, and Dick Cranston answered the invitation. Marjory started up and stood still for half a second, then with joyous eyes and trembling with surprise and excitement, she flew to meet him, and throwing up her arms as nearly to his neck as she could reach, cried, "Oh! Dick—I thought you would never come."

"I came as soon as I could after getting your letter," he replied, gently returning her embrace; "I only had it a week ago."

"This is my brother, Dick Cranston!—Miss Rennie, Dick, of whom I have often spoken in my letters." Dick bowed—Marjory was struck with the superiority of his bow.

"I am sure I am very glad you have come," said Miss Rennie, with a pretty blush and smile and upward glance. "For Marjory has been in the dolefuls and fretting about you I am sure. Now, Marjory, I cannot expect you to come to dinner, so I shall just run away; but I'll come soon again. Good afternoon, Mr. Cranston; you must pay Craigneish a visit." Marjory followed her to the top of the stair. "My dear! *what* a handsome man!" cried Mary. "Why did you not tell me how handsome he is, Mowbray Delamere is not to be compared to him. He is like a sea-king, or a knight of the round table—or, there—I must not keep you—good bye, I am so glad he has come."

"At last, Marge!" said Dick, when she returned to him, as he took her hand and looked wistfully, inquiringly into her face, "I have come to hear what the trouble is!"

"Oh! thank Heaven it is not pressing *now*. I am dying to hear what good fortune has brought you back, Dick. My troubles will keep till to-morrow; tell me all about yourself."

"I will, Marge! How heavenly it is to be here with you, and what a nice pretty room! But you are not looking as bright as I hoped to find you."

"I feel all right now," said Marjory, but her lips quivered and her eyes grew moist. Dick sat down on the sofa, put his arm round her, pressing her to him for a moment, then with a slight sigh he let her go and began his story. "Your letter must have reached Fleury just after I left, and as Lord Beaulieu was away, no one thought of forwarding it. It is not a week since it reached me. I hurried to London, because Brand thought I had a chance of some work from Jervis—you remember, the architect at Beaulieu? When I saw him he gave me a rough sketch of some almshouses to enlarge and finish. You may imagine how glad I was to find they were to be built by a benevolent millionaire at the other side of the river, there—" he pointed to the window. "It will not be a long job, but I can see you and George nearly

every day, for I am to be clerk of the works and architect in one. Of course, the building will be simple enough, still, all this experience helps me on."

"And you will be near us for some months?" cried Marjory, her voice full of thanksgiving. "It seems too good news to be true. How will Mr. Brand do without you?"

"He does not seem inclined to do without me," returned Dick smiling. "He talks of coming down here and finding some place that will do for a studio. He is so much better, he says he'll try painting again. The sunshine and life altogether in the south seems to have stirred his artistic soul. He made a number of capital studies, and he is going to paint some pictures from them. I hope he'll be able to find what he wants, for I feel quite lonely without him. It will do him good, too, to have a talk with you, Marge; he is awfully down at times. I have known him sit for hours and not open his lips, looking all the time as if he saw ghosts rising out of the past. Then again he cheers up, and is the brightest companion in the world. I never thought I should like any one so well."

"I liked him so much too that dreadful time I stayed with you. Oh, Dick! how I wish I could blot it out!"

"Try not to think of it, it is all gone by," he replied, looking kindly at her.

"I wish it were, but it is not!"

"Then the trouble you wanted to tell me is about that unfortunate business? Now, I have told my story, let me have yours, Marge."

"Not now. George will be here directly. You will find him a good deal changed, though he is much better, thank God! and I have a great deal to say; besides, I might cry. I won't if I can help it, but I am a greater fool then I used to be; more easily frightened."

"That will not do, Marge; both George and I always admired your pluck in the old days."

"Oh, Dick! that was before I had anything to hide."

"It's an infernal shame that secrecy should have been forced on you!" he burst out. "You, the frankest, truest girl in the world."

"Well, it was my own fault! Had I been true to my convictions, I should have nothing to fear now. I am afraid you will despise me, but I have never had the courage, the heart, to tell George!"

"Despise you!" he repeated in a peculiar tone, and then paused. "I rather think it is as well you did not; the fewer who share your—I mean, *our* secret, Marjory, the better; and George would only fret. Moreover, he might let it out some day, unintentionally."

"I am so thankful you do not think I ought to tell him, it is

quite a relief to my mind. Did you see my father when you were in London?"

"No! I don't feel it is exactly honest to *go* and see him. If we met, I should speak to him the same as ever; but he *ought* to have stood by me when my mother accused me so cruelly, so basely! I did see old Cross, though. He has always been a trump to me. He thinks and observes a good deal for such a dry methodical chap. He is greatly interested in you and George. Does your father ever write to you?"

"Scarcely ever. Sometimes to George; but *I* am no favourite. Oh, here is George!"

The start, the pause of delighted surprise and recognition, then the hearty prolonged hand-shaking, the exclamations and questions which ensued can be readily pictured. The simple homely tea and supper, set forth by Marjory's own hands, assisted intermittently by her brothers; the eager talk, the full free out-pouring of experiences since last they had met; behold! it was all very good.

I do not know why the record of eating is considered somewhat beneath the dignity of a story; eating plays a very important part in life, and the pleasure of a meal in company with those you love is a delight by no means to be despised.

Our trio enjoyed theirs immensely, and when it was over, set forth together to reconnoitre some of the better streets near the river, where Dick hoped to find rooms for partner and self, as George termed him and Brand.

The joy of this re-union revived Marjory's drooping spirits and waning courage. Dick's presence brought strength and safety with it. Nevertheless, several days passed before Marjory found an opportunity of confiding her doubts and fears to him.

He was only able to join his brother and sister at tea time, when George was always present. Then, the first Saturday half-holiday after his arrival was devoted to Brand, and to settling his belongings in the quarters they had chosen, within easy reach of one of the steam ferries, which landed Dick each morning within a short walk of his work.

The next day, Brand was brought to call upon "Miss Acland," who received him with a warm welcome that delighted the kindly Bohemian.

He was looking sunburnt and well. Marjory observed that his step was firmer and more elastic; his head more erect.

He thoroughly enjoyed himself with his three young friends, and insisted on their crossing with him to the opposite side of the river, where he hired a carriage with reckless generosity, and they enjoyed a drive into the country, finishing with tea at a rustic inn.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“A CONFESSION.”

DICK CRANSTON had not been many days established at Dockborough, when Miss Rennie found it convenient to make another late visit to her friend Marjory.

The hour for afternoon tea was past, and Dick had just come in, intending to spend the evening with his chums.

“Well, Marjory dear!” kissing her affectionately, “you see I have kept away a long time, as I knew you would be too much taken up with your brother to want me.”

“Brother or no brother, I am always delighted to see you.”

“Ah! I know better! Now *you* are here, she does not want me. Does she, Mr. Cranston?” with a pretty interrogative bend of the head and coquettish glance.

“I don’t suppose for a moment that I could supply *your* place,” replied Dick, with an easy manner and ready responsive tone that astonished Marjory. “I am sure your society must have done much towards making my sister so fond of Dockborough.”

“I don’t think *you* will like it,” replied Miss Rennie, “after the life you have been accustomed to abroad.”

“I wonder what sort of a life you imagine I lead,” said Dick laughing.

“Oh! a very gay one, I daresay, very different from this humdrum place. Then French ladies are so lively and charming, and different from us.”

“Very different indeed! their brilliant dark eyes and glossy black hair are very striking; but somehow I began to weary for,” glancing at her, “the golden auburn locks and soft blue eyes of my countrywomen.”

“Ah! that is all very fine, but I suspect you have left your heart behind you, Mr. Cranston!”

“No, I assure you, I always keep it by me ready for present use!”

“Dear me! what an inconstant man your brother must be, Marjory.”

“I am sure he is constant in friendship,” she returned, more earnestly than the occasion needed.

“In friendship! perhaps so; but I must not forget. Mother sent me to ask if you would come and help us on Saturday. We are to have all the school children from St. Margaret’s schools to tea and games. We always give them a feast, poor things; and I hope George and Mr. Cranston will come later.”

“I shall go, of course, and with pleasure. When shall I come?” said Marjory.

• “Oh, you must come to luncheon.”

“You must remember, Saturday is a busy morning with me—*this* piggie has to go to market.”

“Oh, never mind, Jack will be in town with the pony carriage and will call for you. It will be an awfully tiresome day. You will come, will you not, Mr. Cranston?”

“You are very good to ask me, Miss Rennie, but I fear I cannot have the pleasure of joining you, I have an engagement on that day.”

“Then you must really give it up,” she exclaimed, and thereupon plunged into a very prompt flirtation *à propos* of his refusal and her own insistence, in which Dick took part with spirit. Marjory was quite amazed how long they continued to talk nonsense; at last, the young lady with many tender expressions and a hug to Marjory, saw fit to depart. Dick followed her down stairs. They must have continued their conversation at the door, for it was some minutes before Marjory heard the carriage drive away.

“Your little friend is an arrant flirt,” said Dick laughing, as he threw himself on the sofa when he returned, “and rather pretty, with her red hair and fair skin.”

“You took my breath away, both of you,” returned Marjory. “I had no idea Mary would chatter in that way to a stranger.”

“There is no harm in her,” said Dick carelessly. “It’s just the skittishness of a filly.”

“It is all very well for you to talk of her red hair when she was gone; you called it golden auburn to her face.”

“Oh, I was talking of my countrywomen generally,” and though his mouth was grave, his blue eyes smiled.

“Nonsense, Dick, you coolly looked to see what colour her hair was before you spoke.”

The culprit made no reply, he seemed lost in thought. Marjory moved to and fro, folding up her work and arranging the room.

“I wish,” resumed Dick, “she had not asked us to this school feast. It cheats *me* out of another half holiday. There seems a fate against our having that confidential talk you want. I am most anxious to know what troubles you. Suppose you come away with me on Sunday after dinner to that park they talk of up the river.”

“Yes, to Salisbury Park,” put in Marjory.

“There is a tram, I think, that goes by the gate,” he continued. “George is going off somewhere with young Rennie, and shall we ask Brand to come in, in the evening?”

“Oh yes, do! I shall enjoy a stroll in the park with you, for I am longing to tell you everything.”

With a sigh, Marjory sat down beside him, and leant her head against his shoulder with sisterly familiarity, but Dick soon drew

gently away, rose and went to look out of the window. Marjory looked a little surprised, but accounted for his unsympathetic movement by reflecting that boys were averse to be petted, only George was ready enough to let her cuddle him—then he had been ill and weak. George coming in just then, and declaring himself ravenously hungry, she thought no more of Dick's peculiarities, and he refused to stay, on the plea that he had promised Brand to return to dinner.

Sunday was all that could be wished in the way of weather, bright, pleasantly warm, with something of invigorating crispness in the air. Though much fatigued by her exertions the previous day in aid of her friend, Marjory prepared with some care and great pleasure for her expedition with Dick. She was a little anxious to ask if anything had happened to worry him, for she fancied she had observed a subtle change in him. He had always been grave, but now he was often absent and abrupt; there was a slight sternness in his expression as if in conflict with something, and he was certainly colder, less gently sympathetic to herself. Nevertheless he was her best and dearest friend, and she would try to look well-dressed to walk out with him.

George had started early with his friend, who was to drive him in the dog-cart to a pretty village some miles distance, where after service (Mrs. Rennie liked her boys to go to church) they were to lunch with the vicar and take a long ramble through the fields and woods.

Marjory was quite ready to start when Dick came for her, and while she drew on her gloves he looked at her from head to foot, with an expression which induced Marjory to say with a saucy smile, "Do I look nice, Dick? Fit to be seen with?"

"You know you do," he returned grimly, adding with one of his kindly smiles which gave such sweetness to his grave face, "You know I am always proud to be seen with my smart little sister; not so little either—stand here before me—your head is nearly up to my chin."

"Not nearly! I am afraid I have none of the dignity of height. Come, it is almost three o'clock."

Salisbury Park was a favourite resort of the Dockborough "upper ten." For the humbler classes it lacked tea-gardens and small taverns, being a couple of miles from the nearest quarters inhabited by them. It was a comparative solitude, therefore, when Marjory and Dick descended from the crowded tram-car and walked leisurely through the gates into the pleasant shade of the trees and on over the soft fragrant grass, to a seat commanding a view down the slope below them to the wide river, its opposite banks clothed with woods and dotted with pretty white villas. A boat here and there spread its canvas wings to catch what breeze there was.

"This is a relief," said Dick. "I must own, though I have no

pretensions to aristocratic exclusiveness, I hate to be crammed up with a heap of Sunday passengers. That fat old publican sat upon you, didn't he?"

"Yes, rather."

"This is a nicer place than I expected," he resumed. "I wish I could spirit you away to Fleury, Marge, it is a delicious spot."

"You were sorry to leave it?"

"I was very glad to leave it; beautiful as it is, I could not live there. It would be merely vegetating, but *you* would enjoy a summer there. I wish, Marge, you had a little more beauty and colour in your life! Do you know, I used to feel indignant with myself in the long summer evenings for having all that loveliness about me, when you were broiling in a seaport town. You don't know how I used to long for you when I rambled about alone."

"Did you?" said Marjory. "Yes, I should have enjoyed those rambles oh, so much! But, Dick, dear, I have been very happy and very comfortable, in fact, happier than I ever was before, until about three weeks ago." And she proceeded to give him an account of the connection between Mrs. Morrison and the Rennies, and the shock the discovery had given her. "In truth I shall never feel safe again," she ended with a sigh.

"It is very curious," said Dick, who had listened with profound interest, "and exceedingly embarrassing. Your best plan, no doubt, would be to tell your story to Mrs. Rennie before any one else had a chance of doing so, but certainly not until absolutely necessary. It was an awful piece of ill luck your falling in with Ellis."

"But is it not extraordinary his taking a fancy to me?" observed Marjory meditatively; "a clever man of the world who had seen so much."

Dick looked at her with a slight smile. "Perhaps it was," he said slowly. "There is no accounting for such things, however; anyhow it was a misfortune for you. The cruellest part of all is that the fear of such a story (which sounds much worse than it really is) becoming known will destroy the sense of security—the self-reliance without which life is scarce worth having. Try, Marjory, to put this fear out of your thoughts; all the thinking on earth will not help you. No one who *knows* you will ever believe that you were not more sinned against than sinning. Unless this Morrison woman finds you here, you are safe enough."

"But nothing can lift the consciousness of what I have done from my own heart!" said Marjory sadly.

"Marge," cried Dick, with intense feeling, and grasping her hand tightly, "I would forfeit years of my life if I could blot out that miserable episode from yours. Keep up your courage, my

darling. It is too bad that your life should be blighted by the misconduct of others. Always remember that I will do all I can to help you, because you are as dear to me as if you were my own——sister, and because I must atone as far as I can for the trouble my mother has brought upon you."

"Oh, Dick, I fear nothing when you are with me," she exclaimed with quivering lips and unsteady accents. She had never seen him so moved before, and she thought no music had ever sounded so sweet as the rich, deep tones of his voice. She was conscious of a double impulse—one to throw her arms round his neck, another imperatively forbidding such an action, which reduced her to laying her other hand almost timidly over his.

"I wish I could be with you always, then," he said dreamily, while his grasp gradually relaxed; and after a pause he resumed, "These Morrisons may never come here after all, at least during your stay."

"But, Dick, where else can I go? It is quite impossible I can live at home. I hope always to be with George."

"I should almost prefer your being with Mrs. Carteret. You would be better off."

"Away from George and yourself. That would not make me happy! Then I should have to see Mr. Ellis, and I dread him. Oh, I do dread him!"

"Tell me, Marge," said Dick, with sudden animation, "how is it that you did not take ~~a~~ fancy to that fellow? He has, I suppose, what are called charming manners, and is certainly distinguished looking."

"I sometimes wonder I did not!" said Marjory, with frank simplicity. "He talked delightfully, and really seemed very fond of me; but I was indignant with him at first, and never quite got over it. Still, Dick, if he had been ready to ask my father's consent and marry openly I should have married him, and perhaps grown fond of him by this time."

"Very likely," said Dick contemptuously. "Women seem able to get fond of anything!"

"Do not be unreasonable," returned Marjory. "If Mr. Ellis had been my husband and taken me before the world, I should have been grateful to him, and gratitude counts for a great deal."

"Gratitude," growled Dick. "You do not owe him much gratitude now." He rose; and Marjory asking, "Why are you cross?" (to which question she got no answer) followed his example. They walked on slowly for some time in silence, then Dick said, in a slightly embarrassed tone, "There is one matter I want to speak to you about, Marge, though you may be offended."

"What is it, Dick?" asked Marjory, changing colour, and so visibly disturbed that his eyes grew soft and compassionate.

"Your nerves are not what they were," he said; "or perhaps," with a change of expression, "conscience makes a coward of you?"

"No, it does not."

"Well," he resumed with an effort, "I wish you would not let that Captain Rennie hang about you as he did yesterday. You are a bit of a coquette. I suppose you cannot help it; for I suspect you do not care a rap for him, but it would make all sorts of unpleasantness, and I do not think he is worth that."

"Captain Rennie hang about me!" repeated Marjory in the blankest amazement. "Why, Dick, you are crazy to think of such nonsense. He was obliged to help me at tea and in the games. He could not help it. He is good natured, as the whole family are, but he is only just not bored with me."

"I am sure you think so, Marge, or you would not say it; but I could have pitched him into that fish-pond near the swings with pleasure! He would not let any one have a chance of speaking to you."

"And I am sure *you* did not care to speak to me. You were far too much taken up with *his* sister to think of your own," returned Marjory tartly.

"I was not taken up with any one; I was bored to death," said Dick gloomily.

Marjory had coloured up, and her eyes sparkled as of yore; but suddenly a change passed over her, tears dimmed her quick glances, and, slipping her arm through her companion's, she said gently, "Don't quarrel with me, Dick, and spoil the first happy hour I have had for three long weeks. As to Captain Rennie, I shall not see him again probably before he goes away. If you only saw him a little oftener you would acknowledge that he is just civil to me for his sister's sake, no more."

"Quarrel with you, Marge! God knows, I don't want that! Perhaps I was wrong. I think my temper is not as good as it used to be."

"Nonsense, Dick! But I fancy you are not as happy as you were! There is something—I do not know what—of sadness about you. If you have any trouble, dear, will you not tell me?"

"I have none I care—I mean I have none to tell you, Marge," and he pressed her hand close to his side. "On the contrary, I am getting on far better than I could have hoped. If I could see you clear of Ellis I should have nothing left to wish for." But he sighed as he said it. "Come, I think we had better turn our faces homewards. Brand will be waiting for us."

They quickened their pace, and soon fell into pleasant discourse. Marjory was surprised to perceive how old Dick seemed to have become since they had last met, or rather how mature. He appeared to have thought and observed much, and his descrip-

tions of what he had seen were vivid and graphic. Then, his earnestness was infinitely delightful to Marjory's warm, sincere nature. How different from the cynicism which tinged everything Mr. Ellis said—even his love-making.

When they reached home it was already dusk, and Marjory quickly lit the lamp, expecting every moment that Brand would make his appearance. She removed her hat and hastily arranged her hair. Returning to the sitting room, she found Dick still alone, standing by the open window gazing at the river, across which the light of a fine harvest moon made a broad streak of rippled silver, apparently in deep thought. "Mr. Brand is late," said Marjory, placing a bowl of flowers on the tea table, which was already laid.

"Yes, but he will be here presently; he likes to come."

"And I like to have him." Dick drew a chair to the table, and picking up a folded newspaper which had fallen on the floor, said, "Brand sent you this, but I forgot to give it to you before we went out. There is a review of some new books he thought you would like to see."

"Thank you. I will read it while I am waiting for George. Dick," she resumed, sitting down on the sofa facing him, the lamp light falling on her pretty bright brown hair, her speaking eyes and face, where air and motion had brought a soft rich colour. "Dick, I do not think I ever told you what Mr. Ellis threatened the last time I saw him."

"No; you told me you saw him, that was all."

"He warned me never to love any man, for he would tell whoever I was going to marry that I had gone away with him." She blushed crimson, thinking of the exact words Ellis had used.

"He is an unmanly scoundrel," exclaimed Dick angrily; "and no man worthy of you would heed him."

"I shall never put any man to the test, Dick; so you may be sure I will never 'flirt' with any one. I renounce such ideas. It would be too humiliating to make a confession, and I never could deceive any man."

"Ah! Marge, stay till you fall in love. You do not know how hard, how bitter it is to give up any one that you love passionately. It would break your tender little heart, Marge."

"But, Dick," in much surprise, "how do *you* know, *you* never were in love?" ending in an acute tone of inquiry.

Dick did not answer immediately. The colour came slowly to his sunburnt cheek, and a dreamy look to his grave blue eyes.

"Yes! Marge," he replied in a low voice, "I have been in love—I *am* in love, as I trust you never will be."

"Really and truly, Dick? Does it make you unhappy? Does *she* not love you? Oh! Dick, if she knew what a dear, kind, true-hearted fellow you are, she would love you."

"Well, Marge, I cannot tell you more than this, that she is so twined round my heart that, although I would give—oh! I don't know what—to feel differently towards her; though I have striven against myself with all my force, I grow more passionately fond of her every day."

He leant his arm on the table and shaded his face with his hand. Marjory was silent and even awestruck at this outburst. An odd sense of pain oppressed her.

"Why will you not confide in me as I do in you?" she asked tremulously.

"It is quite different," murmured Dick.

"I wish I could help you. I wish I could make everything happy and smooth for you," said Marjory, tenderly coming over and laying her hand on his shoulder. He made no reply. "Just tell me one thing. Is she very pretty?"

"To me. Yes."

"And is she fair or dark?"

"Oh! dark. Big black eyes and shining black hair."

"Then she is a Frenchwoman!" exclaimed Marjory, in a somewhat disappointed tone.

"I will not answer another question," said Dick resolutely, "I never intended to say so much. I slipped into it somehow. Never remind me of it again. There is nothing but pain in thinking of a woman one cannot marry."

"I will not, then," said Marjory humbly, while she thought: Can he have fallen in love with a married woman? It would be too dreadful! "But if I may not speak any more, I want you to remember that I feel for you as you do for me, dear brother." And she kissed him lightly on the brow.

Dick pressed her hand hard, but did not reply for a moment. "Thank you, Marge," he said at last. "We will never speak of this again."

Marjory, who was greatly disturbed by this confession, now busied herself about the table, and presently said: "Do you think Mr. Brand will come?"

"I begin to think not," returned Dick, looking up from the paper he was affecting to read. "I hope he has not had one of his sudden attacks. He suffers terribly from neuralgia at times."

"Then I will make tea. If he comes at all he will be here by the time it is ready." As she spoke the sound of steps and whistling approached, and George came in, looking as if he had had a happy day.

"Isn't Mr. Brand come yet?" he asked. "Oh, let us have tea. We had rather a dusty drive back, and I am dying for a cup. We have had a delightful day. The vicar is a jolly old fellow, and told us some capital stories. What have you two been doing with yourselves?"

An interchange of adventures followed, and Dick seemed to grow more himself while chatting with his chum.

Marjory was glad to listen. Indeed George, when in spirits, as she was rejoiced to see was the case, did not ask anything more than a good listener. Not being able to fix her attention on what was being said, she took up the paper to find the notice of which Brand spoke. Her eye, however, was caught by the column said to be so attractive to women—Births, deaths, marriages. Suddenly she uttered an exclamation, "Oh! Dick, I am so sorry. That dear, pretty baby is dead. What a blow to the poor mother;" and she read: "'On the 20th inst. at Eastbourne, of diphtheria, Edward Reginald Cranston Maynard, only son of the late Reginald Maynard, and grandson of Edward Cranston Maynard, of Leighton Abbot, aged eighteen months.'"

"It will kill the old man!" cried Dick. "I *am* sorry for this. Lord Beaulieu will feel it too! He was hoping his sister would go and stay with him at Fleury, and bring the boy later on. Such a fine, healthy little chap. Brand will be quite cut up."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THE day following this memorable Sunday, Mrs. Acland had a busy afternoon, shopping and preparing for the annual exodus of the family to the sea-side. She returned somewhat fatigued and ordered a cup of tea and some thin bread and butter to be brought to her in the dining-room. While sipping this refreshment, she reflected with some satisfaction on the course matters had taken since the same period last year. Three times had that unmanageable Marjory come back on her hands and three times she had got rid of her—certainly the stars in their courses fought on her (Mrs. Acland's) side. It was right and natural that Marjory should reside with her brother and take care of him—it accounted for her absence in the most satisfactory manner. True, Mr. Acland had to send the tiresome girl a small sum quarterly, but after all, they were cheaply rid of both stepson and daughter. Then neither had asked for any addition to their scanty allowance. Mrs. Acland made tolerably sure that, for the future, she held her husband and his belongings in the hollow of her hand. She was succeeding in society, too; several heads of distinguished families in the neighbourhood had called upon her, and she meditated giving some select dinners on her return to town. "Yes," she thought, "I have not done badly, considering all the——"

"If you please, 'm," said the housemaid, entering with a salver on which lay a letter, "will you see the gentleman?"

Mrs. Acland took the letter, opened, glanced at it and grew

somewhat white, then catching a surprised look in her servant's eyes, she said haughtily :

"Another of these endless petitions; why did you let the man in?"

"He called before, 'm, and made particular inquiries when you would be in. I thought he was a gentleman."

"Well, as you *have* let him in, I must see him," returned her mistress, crushing up the letter in her hand, and as the girl left the room she carefully dropped it into a glowing cavity in the fire. The next moment Brand stood before her.

"I thought," she said harshly, "you promised never to seek me again."

"I did——" he paused, even by the half light of a rapidly-closing day she saw that he was deadly pale, "and I intended to keep my word. Circumstances have changed, and I am compelled to take counsel with you. For your *own* sake see me as soon as possible. I leave time and place to you. I dare not write lest I betray you. Believe me, I do not wish to injure you."

They both remained standing; both spoke low and hurriedly.

"I am going out of town the day after to-morrow and I do not see how I can manage it." She had dropped her harsh resentful tone, as if struck by the urgency of his.

"You can manage anything if you choose; promise to do it and I will wait your time, but the sooner the better for yourself."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Euston Hotel."

"Change to Charing Cross and I will try to manage an interview, but on no account write to me or call again."

"I will do as you desire, but our consultation cannot be got over in a few minutes."

"Very well, now go. I will ring for the servant to let you out; stay till she comes." She rang, and as the door opened said, calmly and loftily, "It is quite impossible to subscribe to everything, and Mr. Acland does much in the parish; it is therefore useless to apply to him. I wish you good-day. The door, Jane," and Brand was ushered out.

As Jane observed to cook on her return to the kitchen teatable, "Missus makes short work of such gentry."

When she was alone Mrs. Acland leant her arm on the mantelpiece and pressed her hand against her brow. "What can it be?" she murmured. "What can it be? Not money? He was, and probably is, a weak fool, but he would never press me for money as that—that villain Blake did; nor would he injure me, I really believe he would not. But there is something wrong, some danger to us both! Why am I tormented when I am leading so irreproachable a life? I make husband and children happy and comfortable. I have turned many a dangerous corner, why

should *this* be worse than anything in the past? Yet I feel it is, my heart turns cold." She went to the cellarette, took out brandy and a wine glass, then she paused, looking at them with a curious expression, half fierce, half frightened. "No!" she said aloud, "No! If I begin *that* it is all over with me!" and she replaced them.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed the half hour. "I must not idle here," she thought, and rang for the parlour-maid. "I forgot to tell you that Mr. Cross may dine here, so put another place at table," and she went away to her own room.

An hour later she sat in the snug study, well and carefully dressed, with a calm face and air of repose, her pretty children at either side looking at a book of pictures which she held open on her knee. It was a pretty homelike group to greet Mr. Cross's eyes when he entered soon after. But those small quiet optics of his had been considerably opened of late, and Mrs. Acland's "groupings" had less effect than formerly. His dry immovable manner gave no clue to his condition of mind, but from the day when Dick, burning with indignation, pierced by the sting of finding in his mother his bitterest foe, told his wrongs and sorrows to the cautious bachelor, Mrs. Acland for ever forfeited her place in the estimation of her husband's partner.

He was greeted as warmly as ever, the children were presented, the best chair drawn forward for him, the choicest morsels heaped on his plate.

Conversation was scanty and intermittent till the servants left the room and Mr. Cross had been helped to number one of the two glasses of port he always enjoyed, but never exceeded, after dinner. Mrs. Acland had mentioned, as a sop to Cerberus, that she received very satisfactory accounts from George and Marjory; the former was greatly improved in health, which he certainly would not have been had he not had his sister's care, and that both were the constant and favoured guests of those excellent people the Rennies.

"That's well," returned Mr. Cross; "perhaps it's better for Marjory to be there than here."

"I think," said Mr. Acland seriously, "it is Marjory's duty to be with her brother."

"I suppose you never hear anything of Dick?"

"Never," replied Mrs. Acland sadly. "That poor boy has been a terrible trial to me. Because in my distraction and distress—when appearances were so much against him—knowing the tendencies he *might* have inherited, I implored him *if* he were guilty to confess, he assumed that I accused him, and spoke most improperly to Mr. Acland, most ungratefully, then he left the house——" she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"A very unfortunate business," returned Mr. Cross. "He generally looks in on me when he happens to be in London; he

knows I never suspected him. He has been rather lucky—his education has told. Jervis, the well-known architect, noticed him when he was helping the clerk of the works at Lord Beaulieu's, and so he has got on. He was over in France doing some alterations for Lord Beaulieu, and paid me a visit a little time ago when he was on his way to another job in the north."

"I am sure I am very glad to hear it," said Mrs. Acland. "I wish he had a little more sense of duty to me—of gratitude to the generous man who adopted him——" she again put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Mr. Cross coughed, he had a short, dry cough occasionally, and sipped his wine, then he changed the conversation.

"I have been trying to persuade your husband to bestow next Saturday afternoon and Sunday on me, instead of going to you at Folkestone. There's a pretty little property to be sold near——, which I have some thoughts of buying; I should like Acland's opinion of it."

"I am sure he would be most happy to be of any use to you, Mr. Cross, and for my own part; though I rather grudge a Sunday out of the few we shall have by the sea, I will be generous and give him up to you, especially as you are going to take him into the country," said Mrs. Acland blandly, with a gracious deliberate smile.

"Thank you. Then, Acland, we might leave the office early, and catch the one o'clock train at Waterloo. It is only an hour to Thirlmere and you are completely in the country, with as pretty a trout stream running through it as you could wish to see."

"Very well, I am at your disposal. And perhaps as there is not much doing just now, I could spend the week after next with Mrs. Acland at the sea-side."

"I see no reason why you should not," was the compliant reply.

"Thank you, Mr. Cross, you are evidently ready to make payment in full," and with a dignified bend of the head she retired to the comfortable study, to think hard how she should best take advantage of this fresh instance that fortune had not deserted her. Mr. Acland's absence would give her the opportunity she needed; now to plan a patent necessity for coming up to town on Saturday.

* * * * *

To Marjory the day marked by these events at Falkland Terrace was also troubled. She had had a sleepless night. Dick's confession of the evening before had produced an extraordinary and painful effect upon her. She could scarcely understand it herself. She knew it was but natural, as Ellis had pointed out, that both her brothers should, like other young men, fall in love, marry,

and cease to consider her of the same importance to them as she now was, but did not anticipate the change would be so bitter. To think that Dick—who was so particularly sympathetic, who seemed to understand her a great deal better than George—Dick, who appeared to like her the better because he had forgiven her so much, should be devoted heart and soul to another woman, was more than she could bear. In future if he showed her kindness and consideration it would be from pity and a sense of duty, not from the real preference for her company, the pleasure in her presence he used to have. How cruel the loss, no words could ever express! All his tenderness, all the indescribable gentleness of his strength, the quiet watchful affection which made itself more felt than seen, would be drawn away to that brilliant French woman (she must be French), with big black eyes; of course, being totally different from himself, would be an additional attraction. But why did she make him unhappy? Marjory could never forgive her for *that*, never! Perhaps it was not her fault. Dick seemed unhappy; yes, he *was* quite unhappy; perhaps cruel parents intervened? It was not likely, thought Marjory, as the tears she could not restrain flowed freely under the safe shadow of the silent night, it was not likely any girl would be scornful to a man like Dick, and his image rose before her, so handsome, so unconscious of his own good looks, so distinct with the quiet dignity of strength—strength even more of character than physical power—how could she refuse him? And with this question flashed another, which seemed to rend her soul as with a torturing rack of shame and agony. Had Dick asked *her*, would any power on earth have kept her from saying yes? Then the terrible truth broke on her, as in a blaze of light, that she loved this man, whom she considered her brother, who treated her as a sister, with all the warmth a husband could desire.

It was a fearful shock. How she shrank from herself, how she prayed that Dick might never discover the disgraceful truth, how sternly she resolved to stamp out her guilty affection and destroy it! Was she not unfortunate? Oh! it would have been better to have married Ellis and escaped the pain, the horror of this discovery. Yet, no! she was too loyal to be false to her own hidden love; no man should ever call her wife, as her beloved, the lord of her heart, was forbidden to her.

Morning found her pale and exhausted, but she started up resolved to lose no time in beginning to fight the good fight which lay before her, with the conviction that no change could ever come to her present condition of heart and mind which the young entertain. She determined to give her future life to her brothers—yes, she would compel herself to look on Dick only as a brother, and time, reflection, work would restore her to her senses. Thank heaven, it would be quite evening before Dick could come, and perhaps he would not even then.

"Why, Marge, have you seen a ghost?" asked George at their early breakfast, "you look like one."

"No, I have lain awake thinking."

"Thinking? What about?"

"Oh! I have plenty of things to think of. How I can save two-and-sixpence in this week's housekeeping; of when my father will write next; and oh! of that poor Mrs. Maynard and the dear little baby."

"Well, I wish you would not, you trouble too much about other people. Look here, Marge, here is a note from Miss Rennie, I forgot to give it to you last night. They are going to see the D'Oyley Carte Company to-morrow night and have a place for you. I shall ask Dick to come with me to the gallery."

"How good Mrs. Rennie is," said Marjory languidly, when she had read the note.

"Don't you care to go?" asked George, opening his eyes.

"Yes, of course I do. Mary is coming in to-day, and I am to go shopping with her."

"She lives in the shops, I think; but what a pretty girl she is. If I wasn't a poor maimed, penniless chap, I'd go in for Mary Rennie."

"Oh! George, you are worth a dozen of her. Why must every one fall in love? I am sure it must be more a worry than a pleasure. Make up your mind to be an old bachelor, and you and I will take care of each other all our days."

"What has gone wrong with you, Marge," cried George laughing, "you are the last girl to preach so dreary a doctrine. You will be leaving *me* some day, and then I will have to shift for myself; anyhow, you look after me now, so I wish you would see to the coat I wore yesterday, it caught on something as I got down from the dog-cart, and the lining is torn. It is my best go-to-meeting garment and must last an indefinite time. Please mend it before next 'Sawbath,' as our worthy principal calls it."

"Very well, George. I wonder what became of Mr. Brand, last night?"

"If Dick does not come in by eight o'clock, I will go down to their place and ask."

"Yes, do," returned Marge, who was brushing his hat. "There now, go dear, it is nearly half-past eight."

Having got rid of her brother, Marjory proceeded to busy herself severely, so much so, that by noon there was nothing left to do, and she was reduced to overhaul George's shirts, which were in excellent order.

It was quite a relief when Mary Rennie came, and they went away together to get that new dress which Marjory had never yet had time to buy. Then they had a great deal to say about the expected pleasure of seeing "Patience;" altogether, Marjory got

through the day successfully, and in the evening there was her dress for the theatre to be got ready.

George went after eight to see what had happened to Brand and Dick, and returned just as his sister was thinking of going to bed.

"It was no wonder he could not come to us last night. When Dick went back last night, he found a line to say that Brand found he was obliged to go up to London for a few days, and not to expect him till he saw him. It was a very sudden move. But though they are such chums, Dick knows nothing of his life or friends; I fancy it has put Dick out, though. He seemed in the blues, so I stopped on and we had a talk over old times, when you used to call him the monster; he walked back with me to the door, but I could not persuade him to come in. He said he had a headache."

"Had he?" and Marjory mused a moment. "He was fretting, no doubt, about that black-eyed girl, and it would give him no comfort to come in and say good-night to the sister who loved him so well."

"I shall go to bed, George. I do not want to look like a ghost at the theatre to-morrow."

"No, no, that would never do."

Notwithstanding her distress of mind and contempt for herself, Marjory took due pains to look well on the occasion of accompanying Mrs. Rennie and party to the Theatre Royal, Dockborough.

One of the two pretty half-dress evening frocks chosen for her by Aunt Carteret was put in order, its lace cascades pulled out, its knots of ribbon pressed and refreshed, and a pair of Paris gloves carefully rubbed with bread till quite as good as new. The state of feverish resistance to her own thoughts in which the day had passed had given colour to her cheek and sparkling restlessness to her eyes; and when she came forth from her chamber, George, who was having a pipe in company with Dick, exclaimed, "By Jove! Marge, you are a swell; something better than the brown stuff you pricked your fingers over in Falkland Terrace, eh, Dick?" Neither had seen her in evening dress before.

"These personal remarks are very embarrassing," she said laughing. "Good-evening, Dick; any more news of Mr. Brand?"

"No, he will probably write to-day. It must have been a sudden thought; he said nothing about it at breakfast on Sunday. George is quite right, Marge, you are no end of a swell," and Dick's eyes dwelt on her with a grave, thoughtful expression, as if he were pained, not pleased.

"Are you both going?" asked Marjory, fetching the lampshade and putting it on. "How can you bear such a glare?"

"Yes, we will start as soon as you are gone."

Here a tap at the door elicited "Come in," from George, and Captain Rennie, in evening dress, his crush hat under his arm, a brilliant blossom in his button-hole, walked in, holding in his hand a lovely little bouquet of carnations, heliotrope and delicate fern.

"Good evening," he said generally. "My mother is waiting for you, Miss Acland; rather early, isn't it? but you know she is ferociously punctual. Permit me." With a bow he presented the flowers to Marjory, who accepted them with a gracious:

"Thank you very much; they are quite beautiful," and proceeded to fasten them in the opening of her corsage, where they looked charming, at least so her admiring brothers thought.

Then with a nod and smiling good-bye she went swiftly away, followed by Rennie, after he had exchanged a word or two with George.

Mrs. Rennie was quite pleased with Marjory's appearance, and told her so with her usual good-nature.

"Ain't she smart, Mary?" she said as soon as they were comfortably seated, and she had thrown off a gorgeously-embroidered Indian wrap, settled her bracelets, and felt that her brooch was in its right place. "Where did you get that pretty dress? Not in Dockborough, I'll be bound."

"No, Mrs. Rennie, Aunt Carteret gave it to me last year."

"Law, dear, how well you have kept it! You are just the wife for a poor man. You look well in a trifle."

"That is fortunate! I am not likely to find a rich husband," said Marjory laughing.

"Oh, there is no knowing. Now we mustn't talk, the curtain is going up. My goodness! what short waists all those young ladies have."

For awhile Marjory forgot her sorrows and her self-contempt in the charming music and quaint drolleries of "Patience." Indeed she threw herself so completely into the amusement of the hour, that she grew excited and talkative between the acts, and Captain Rennie, who sat beside her, leant forward to laugh at her remarks and compliment her on her wit.

When all was over, however, she felt marvellously exhausted and glad to be at home. George returned a little later, highly pleased with his evening's entertainment. Dick had gone straight back to his own diggings, he said, after seeing his chum clear of the crowd.

"Though I don't want to be taken care of as he seems to think I do. I am very nearly as strong as ever I was," continued George. "I told him so, but he did not seem to hear me. I do not know what's come to Dick, he seems in a sort of dream, and he is a bit sulky into the bargain. He scarcely laughed at that funny fellow, the poet. To be sure he saw the play in London. What is the matter with him?"

"I am sure I do not know, George; I suppose every one has their own private worries."

"But he used to tell you everything. I am sure he ought to be satisfied, he is getting on very well."

"I am so tired, George, I must go to bed. Good-night."

The following day Forbes Rennie had got permission to leave the office early in order to inspect a fine new steamer which was being built and was nearly completed in a famous yard at the other side of the river; a son of the builder was to accompany him, and of-course he carried off George with him.

Marjory, therefore, took her tea alone, and left to herself felt very miserable. She had just risen to seek distraction in some numbers of *Temple Bar* lent her by Miss Rennie, when Dick Cranston walked in.

What a painful reversal of the former state of things it was, to feel the necessity of masking her feelings, of preserving her ordinary tone, instead of the frankly expressed pleasure at his coming, the cordial out-spoken confidence in a dear brother.

"I am glad you have come in, Dick," she said cheerfully, "George is out."

"Yes, he told me he was going. No—no, thank you," seeing her about to pour out a cup of tea, "I have had some," and he sat down by the window, looking out in an absent way, a certain constraint in his manner increasing Marjory's discomfort.

"Have you heard from Mr. Brand?" she asked, as she put away the tea things.

"I had a letter this morning. He seems to have one of his bad turns of neuralgia, and he wants me to run up on Saturday and spend Sunday, at least till late in the afternoon. He offers to frank me, with his usual generosity; of course I should go in any case, as he wishes it."

"Yes, of course; I am sorry he suffers so much; has he had advice?"

"I do not know. He is too ready to take chloroform. He used to take opium; that helped to shatter his nerves, I fancy. Then I am inclined to believe that any shock or trouble brings on an attack; perhaps the business he went away about was unpleasant."

"Very likely, there seems no end of trouble," said Marjory, placing the lamp and her work-basket on the table, gladly threading her needle for an occupation, and much concerned by the gloominess of Dick's countenance.

"You did not seem to think there was much trouble in the world last night," said Dick, coming over to sit opposite to her, and smiling rather grimly.

"No, I was very much amused. How clever and pretty it all was. Did you enjoy it, Dick?"

"No, I did not."

"Does it tire you to see anything the second time?"

"I will tell you what I did *not* enjoy, Marjory—watching you smiling and talking and fascinating that booby young Rennie; why you hardly stopped to attend to the play."

"Dick!" in a tone of surprise. "What possesses you to say—to think such nonsense?"

"No matter what possesses me, it may be an evil spirit, but it enables me to see pretty clearly."

"No, Dick, it distorts your vision," she returned gravely and steadily, her resolution returning with a sense of indignation.

"You are a coquette by nature, Marge; I suppose you cannot help it. Why the very way you took those flowers from the fellow was enough to lead a man on."

"But the flowers were not from him; they were from Mary, she gathered them and tied them up. I was amused with the play, so was Captain Rennie, and we laughed together."

"You know," resumed Dick in a low tone full of feeling, "that I believe every word you say, as I do scarcely any thing else, and I hope you are unconscious of your own maddening ways, but if you do not take care you will get into some other scrape besides making those that love you miserable."

"You must have lost your senses, Dick, or you would not be so unkind, so ungenerous, as to remind me—" her lip quivered and she broke off; mastering herself, she exclaimed in an unsteady voice, "There, I will *not* quarrel with you; I suppose your own unhappiness makes you unjust, but you need not be cruel to the sister who is so fond of you," she ended, with an assumption of her old natural tone, of which she was justly proud.

"I believe I am a brute," he returned, shading his face with his hand, "and I *may* be wrong. But if you knew all I have to fight against——" he stopped.

"You know I always feel with you and for you, but, indeed, you have no right to accuse me of being a frivolous coquette. Heaven knows I have had enough to make me steady. Still, if you imagine because I made one great mistake I am never to speak to any man, or have a little pleasant chaff, you are very much mistaken."

"Yes, you like to feel your own power; I am not so far wrong."

"I do nothing of the kind. I *have* no power, and though I love you, you shall not tyrannize over me; you are not such a good example yourself! You say you are deeply attached to some one somewhere and yet you can flirt with Mary Rennie as if you liked no one better."

"Liked no one better? Why, Marge, I scarcely know what she is like."

"Then it was not for want of opportunities of seeing her; you hardly left her all Saturday afternoon. You see how we are liable to be misunderstood, only *I* did not attack you for being flighty and inconstant! Now I have no one to be inconstant to."

"But I *am* constant. If I were less constant I should be less unhappy," said Dick, looking down at a paper knife he had taken up and was turning over and over.

"Why are you so unkind and harsh, Dick?" her eyes were fast filling; "you never used to misunderstand me and I want to have a little happiness while you are here."

"I cannot make you happy, Marge; you want some one gayer and grander than I am."

"You do not deserve that I should answer such a stupid speech; you know I would rather have you with me than any one else except George. You *ought* to beg my pardon."

There was a short silence. Marjory bent her flushed cheeks and cast down the eyes, from which she kept the tears by a strong effort. Presently Dick rose and brought his chair over beside her. "I do beg your pardon," he said softly, with a sad echo in his voice that touched her heart; "I believe I have been out of my mind; forgive me, Marge," he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"I have told you not to do that, Dick," she said, drawing it away, while she was almost frightened at the beating of her own heart. "It reminds me of Mr. Ellis."

"Then give me a sisterly kiss, Marge, to show you are all right," and he bent his head till it was close to hers.

"Oh! nonsense," cried Marjory laughing pleasantly. "We are not babies to kiss and make up every time we quarrel; let us shake hands like good comrades;" she held hers out and was surprised to find his unsteady.

"I beg your pardon, Marge, for asking. I will never offend again."

"I am not offended, Dick, I only want you to be just and to be my dear true friend as you always have been hitherto."

"And will be always, Marge, always," he replied, rising to go and gaze from the window.

"As to poor Captain Rennie, he and his sister are going to Scotland next week, and Mrs. Rennie goes with them, for the gentleman they expected is not coming, so I shall have no one to exercise my mischievous tendencies on. You must never accuse me of coquetry again, Dick. Come and sit down and tell me some more about your life in France. Why will you not speak to me of the one you love best? It would be a relief to you."

"I cannot, Marge, I dare not, and I am a sorry companion to-night, so I will leave you."

"Can I not be of any comfort to you?" she asked tenderly.

“Yes, if you will promise not to trifle or get into any entanglement till—till you are quite clear of Ellis.”

“You may trust me ! I will take care.”

“Good-night, then ;” he waved his hand and was gone.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

ONE of the most brilliant functions of last month was the private view of the pictures exhibited by the Society of British Artists at their well-known gallery in Suffolk Street. The president, Mr. Whistler, had the happy thought of holding his private view in the evening, and the result was a brilliant gathering of beauty and brains, both excellent qualities, arrayed in evening dress. Afternoon private views are usually rendered disagreeable to the "viewers" by the combination of a heated atmosphere and the necessity of wearing outdoor wraps. Besides, festivities do not properly belong to the afternoon. The evening is their legitimate time, as every reasonable person must acknowledge. A fine summer afternoon may be devoted to enjoyment properly enough, and nothing jars on our sense of the fitness of things. But on these raw days, the dismal hour "'twixt the dark and the daylight" (metrical exigencies will not permit me to invert the two nouns, as I should like to do) is not an inviting one to go forth on pleasure bent. Mr. Whistler is to be congratulated on an inspiration well worthy of imitation.

Perhaps, in some future development of social amenities, our celebrities will consent to go about with distinctive labels hanging like medals from a decorative ribbon that could be made in keeping with their costume. It invariably happens that after attending one of these interesting crushes, one hears that some one has been present whom it would have been a delight to have had pointed out. "Oh! why did I not know she was there?" is quite a stereotyped observation on such occasions. It must be admitted that some celebrities are disappointments. We expect to see an individual with noble brow, deep and searching eyes, with that far-away gaze in them which we unconsciously associate with deep thinkers. The real "he" proves to be a very commonplace person indeed, with a hilly complexion, a vulgar intonation, and a resident smile of self-seeking servility. Happy are we if even his H's are all right. There are men who have conquered Fate and made themselves a name in the world, but who cannot prevail against that terrible letter of the alphabet, so full of traps and pitfalls for those who have not been made aware of them from childhood onward through the years. There are persevering, patient people who, though not "to the manner born," treat the letter H with rigid inflexibility and overcome it, but these often show that a battle has been fought by the

scarcely perceptible pause they make before uttering the asperate, like a horse just before he "takes off" for a fence. There is a too apparent effort about it, a jerky conscientiousness which puts the listener on the track of early shortcomings.

But, luckily, there is a bright side to the medal. There are celebrities to whom, when personally known, the heart goes out at once. Writers of books there are who, as revealed in their books, fall far short of the warm responsiveness they prove in the glance, the smile, the cordial hand-clasp and the pleasant voice.

There are men and women, too, who write disagreeable books and are themselves by no means of the same character. A good-natured, generous, soft-hearted woman, for ever raising to herself idols and finding them clay, delights in depicting human nature at its worst. Another woman who, to judge from her books, one would imagine to be vain, frivolous, heartless, and an adept in the most advanced walks of coquetry, is, on the contrary, a pleasant companion to other women, full of a quiet humour, which seldom peeps out in her novels, and altogether a delightful surprise to those who entertain the popular fancy that a writer may be divined through his writings. Nor is this contradictoriness monopolized by women. I know a man whose books can only be described as foul, whose estimate of human nature as shown in them is the lowest possible; but in conversation nothing of this appears. He never utters a word that could offend the most prudish, though in his printed pages there is hardly one wherein a spade is not called a spade, with a lavish mention of kindred utensils, introduced, as would seem, out of a very riotous love of naming things that seemly people are not wont to name and do not like to think of. Literary society shows us scores of these curious contrasts and teaches us that the study of human nature is a more complex one than it would be if confined to the individual, apart from the outcome of him, as seen in his books, his verses, his music, or his pictures.

Do I not know a man whose verses are exquisite? His rhythmical words and exquisite periods are fit garment for the high and noble thoughts they clothe. His pathos is touching, his learning evident, his skill unquestionable. So far as his art is concerned, his position is unassailable. The man himself is idle, dissolute, a liar, a forger, a companion of thieves and outcasts. His merry moments are those in which he chuckles over the thought of how he has deceived and misled those who have endeavoured to help him out of the mire in which his own faults have plunged him. Into what strange vessels do genius and talent pour their gifts! And how wastefully does nature do much of her work! Or, perhaps, it would be better to call it apparent waste—we see such a very little way before us, we finite atoms, that it is safer to qualify every statement, and above all, to remember Madame de Staël's words, which, for the

width and beauty of their sentiment, might have come from the Book of Books itself, "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner."

Apropos of this, the most pathetic moment, to my mind, in Mr. Groves' play, "As in a Looking-glass," is that in which Lena Despard begs her husband to believe that she really loved him, and that even in her scheming she was not all base and sordid. Mrs. Bernard Beere's impersonation of this part entitles her to take a foremost rank among the first *tragédiennes* as well as the first *comédiennes* of either London or Paris. She fascinates by her grace of movement, her clearness of enunciation and the richness of her voice, as much as she delights by her mastery of each phase of a play that runs through the whole gamut of emotion, from the lightest touch of comedy to the very depths of thrilling tragedy.

The revival of "The Two Roses" at the Criterion carries back the memory of some of us to those whom we shall never see again, either "in front" or on the stage. Byron and poor Amy Fawsitt are among the missing on the latter. The reappearance of an old play cannot fail to bring a few ghosts with it. We look sadly enough upon these wraiths of what was once a tangible, visible presence, with the cordial clasp of a vanished hand and the bright beam from sympathetic eyes, and for the sake of those who shared the old pleasures with us so long ago, we warmly welcome the old plays and laugh with what heart we may at the forgotten quips and cranks.

More old friends are to be summoned up for us by Messrs. Hare and Kendal, at the St. James' Theatre. Every one reads with regret the announcement that this is the last season of their management, owing to the approaching termination of the lease under which they hold the theatre. Under their auspices it has become the very home of refinement, and is one of the few theatres at which one can enjoy the audience as well as the play. One's pleasure is too often marred by the contiguity of persons whose conduct and bearing are lacking in those social amenities which come as naturally as breathing itself to the well-bred. At the St. James', under this joint management of eight years, one was perfectly safe. It is useless to try to solve the problem as to how these things are managed. Perhaps the satisfactory state of affairs in the stalls and dress circle was owing to the subtle influence of that refinement which was perceptible in every smallest detail on the stage.

Those who love to laugh heartily must not fail to see Mr. Edward Terry as "The Woman-Hater," who gets engaged to be married to three women at once; nor "The Arabian Nights," at the Comedy; nor "Miss Esmeralda," at the Gaiety.

These, with a charming "Lady Clancarty" at the St. James', in the shape of Mrs. Kendal, offer a very attractive addition to the list of pleasure places open to us privileged Londoners.

LONDON SOCIETY.

FEBRUARY, 1888.

THE FATAL THREE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL," "LIKE AND UNLIKE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

THE KEY NOTE.

THERE are some men who fashion their own lives with their own thoughts and their own actions, who start in their journey through the world with a settled purpose, and who progress steadily towards a chosen goal. There are other men who tread the maze of life blindly, whose highest hopes and noblest endeavours seem to be the sport of Fate, men around whose footsteps a fatal web has been woven, and who move unconsciously and inevitably towards darkest doom. For these virtue avails not, nor generous feeling, nor the love of truth and honour. They are born to fulfil a mysterious destiny, and from the cradle to the grave they are a pre-ordained sacrifice to the powers of evil.

Book the First.

CLORTIO; OR, THE SPINNING OF THE WEB.

CHAPTER I.

"WE HAVE BEEN SO HAPPY."

"I'M afraid she will be a terrible bore," said the lady, with a slight pettishness in the tone of a voice that was naturally sweet.

"How can she bore us, love? She is only a child, and you can do what you like with her," said the gentleman.

"My dear John, you have just admitted that she is between thirteen and fourteen—a great deal more than a child—a great overgrown girl, who will want to be taken about in the carriage, and to come down to the drawing-room, and who will be always in the way. Had she been a child of Mildred's age, and a playfellow for Mildred, I should not have objected half so much."

"I'm very sorry you object; but I have no doubt she will be a playfellow for Mildred all the same, and that she will not mind spending a good deal of her life in the schoolroom."

"Evidently, John, you don't know what girls of fourteen are. I do."

"Naturally, Maud, since it is not so many years since you yourself were that age."

The lady smiled, touched ever so slightly by the suggestion of youth, which was gratifying to the mother of a seven-year-old daughter.

The scene was a large old-fashioned drawing-room, in an old-fashioned street in the very best quarter of the town, bounded on the west by Park Lane and on the east by Grosvenor Square. The lady was sitting at her own particular table in her favourite window in the summer gloaming; the gentleman was lolling with his back to the velvet-draped mantelpiece. The room was full of flowers and prettinesses of every kind, and offered unmistakable evidence of artistic taste and unlimited means in its possessors.

The lady was young and fair, a tall slip of a woman, who afforded a Court milliner the very best possible scaffolding for expensive gowns. The gentleman was middle-aged and stout, with strongly-marked features and a resolute, straightforward expression. The lady was the daughter of an Irish peer—the gentleman was a commoner, whose fortune had been made in a great wholesale house, which had still its mammoth warehouse near St. Paul's Churchyard and its manufactory at Lyons, but with which John Fausset had no longer any connection. He had taken his capital out of the firm, and had cleansed himself from the stain of commercial dealings before he married the Honourable Maud Donfrey, third daughter of Lord Castle-Connor.

Miss Donfrey had given herself very willingly to the commoner, albeit he was her senior by more than twenty years, and in her own deprecating description of him—was quite out of her set. She liked him not a little for his own sake, and for the power his strong will exercised over her own weaker nature, but she liked him still better for the sake of wealth which seemed unlimited.

She was nineteen at the time of her marriage, and she had been married nine years. Those years had brought the Honourable Mrs. Fausset only one child, the seven-year-old daughter playing about the room in the twilight, and maternity had offered very little

hindrance to the lady's pleasures as a woman of fashion. She had been indulged to the uttermost by a fond and admiring husband; and now for the first time in his life John Fausset had occasion to ask his wife a favour, which was not granted too readily. It must be owned that the favour was not a small one, involving nothing less than the adoption of an orphan girl in whose fate Mr. Fausset was interested.

"It is very dreadful," sighed Mrs. Fausset, as if she were speaking of an earthquake. "We have been so happy alone together—you, and I, and Mildred."

"Yes, dearest, when we have been alone, which you will admit has not been very often."

"Oh, but visitors do not count; they go and come. They don't belong to us; this dreadful girl will be one of us—or she will expect to be. I feel as if the golden circlet of home life were going to be broken."

"Not broken, Maud, only expanded."

"Oh, but you can't expand it by letting in a stranger. Had the mother no people of her own—no surroundings whatever, nobody but you who could be appealed to for this wretched girl?" inquired Mrs. Fausset, fanning herself wearily, as she lolled back in her low chair.

She was dressed in a loose cream-coloured gown, of softest silk and Indian embroidery, and there were diamond stars trembling amongst her feathery golden hair. The flowing garment in which she had dined alone with her husband was to be changed presently for white satin and tulle, in which she was to appear at three evening parties; but in the meantime, having for once in a way dined at home, she considered her mode of life intensely domestic.

The seven-year-old daughter was roaming about with her doll, sometimes in one drawing-room, sometimes in another—there were three opening into each other—the innermost room half conservatory, shadowy with palms and tropical ferns. Mildred was enjoying herself in the quiet way of children accustomed to play alone, looking at the pretty things upon the various tables, peering in at the old china figures in the cabinets, the ridiculous Chelsea shepherd and shepherdess, the Chelsea lady in hawking costume, with a falcon upon her wrist; the absurd lambs, and more absurd foliage, and the Bow and Battersea ladies and gentlemen, with their blunt features and coarse complexions. Mildred was quite happy prowling about, and looking at things in silent wonder; turning over the leaves of illustrated books, and lifting the lids of gold and enamelled boxes; trying to find out the uses and meanings of things. Sometimes she came back to the front drawing-room and seated herself on a stool at her mother's feet, solemnly listening to the conversation, following it much more earnestly, and comprehending it much better than either her father or mother would have supposed possible.

To stop up after nine o'clock was an unwonted joy for Mildred, who went to bed ordinarily at seven. The privilege had been granted in honour of the rare occasion, a *tête-à-tête* dinner in the height of the London season.

"Is there no one else who could take her?" repeated Mrs. Fausset impatiently, finding that her husband took a long time to answer.

"There is really no one else upon whom the poor child has any claim."

"Cannot she remain at school? You could pay for her schooling, of course. I should not mind that."

This was generous in a lady who had brought her husband a nominal five thousand pounds, and who spent his money as freely as if it had been water.

"She cannot remain at school. She is a kind of girl who cannot get on at school. She needs home influences."

"You mean that she is a horrid rebellious girl who has been expelled from a school, and whom I am to take because nobody else will have her."

"You are unjust and ungenerous, Maud. The girl has not been expelled. She is a girl of peculiar temper, and very strong feelings, and she is unhappy amidst the icy formalities of an unexceptionable school. Perhaps had she been sent to some struggling schoolmistress in a small way of business she might have been happier. At any rate she is not happy, and as her parents—dead and gone—were friends of mine in the past I should like to make her girlhood happy, and to see her well married if I can."

"But are there not plenty of other people in the world who would do all you want if you paid them? I'm sure I should not grudge the money."

"It is not a question of money. The girl has money of her own. She is an heiress."

"Then she is a ward in Chancery, I suppose."

"No, she is my ward. I am her sole trustee."

"And you really want to have her here in our own house, and at The Hook, too, I suppose. Always with us wherever we go."

"That is what I want—until she marries. She will be twenty in five years, and in all probability she will marry before she is twenty. It is not a life-long sacrifice that I am asking from you, Maud, and, remember, it is the first favour I have ever asked you."

"Let the little girl come, mother," pleaded Mildred, clambering on to her mother's knee.

She had been sitting with her head bent over her doll, and her hair falling forward over her face like golden rain, for the last ten minutes. Mrs. Fausset had no suspicion that the child had been listening, and this sudden appeal was startling to the last degree.

"Wisdom has spoken from my darling's rosy lips," said Fausset, coming over to the window and stooping to kiss his child.

"My dear John, you must know that your wish is a law to me," replied his wife, submitting all at once to the inevitable. "If you are really bent upon having your ward here she must come."

"I am really bent upon it."

"Then let her come as soon as you like."

"I will bring her to-morrow."

"And I shall have some one to play with," said Mildred in her baby voice; "I shall give her my second best doll."

"Not your best, Mildred?" asked the father, smiling at her.

Mildred reflected for a few moments.

"I'll wait and see what she is like," she said, "and if she is very nice I will give her quite my best doll. The one you brought me from Paris, father. The one that walks and talks."

Maud Fausset sighed, and looked at the little watch dangling on her chatelaine.

"A quarter to ten! How awfully late for Mildred to be up. And it is time I dressed. I hope you are coming with me, John. Ring the bell, please. Come, Mildred."

The child kissed her father with a hearty, clinging kiss which meant a world of love, and then she picked up her doll—not the walking-talking machine from Paris, but a friendly, old-fashioned wax and bran personage—and trotted out of the room, hanging on to her mother's gown.

"How sweet she is," muttered the father, looking after her fondly; "and what a happy home it has been. I hope the coming of that other one won't make any difference."

CHAPTER II.

FAY.

MRS. FAUSSET'S three parties, the last of which was a very smart ball, kept her away from home until the summer sun was rising above Grosvenor Square, and the cocks were crowing in the mews behind Upper Parchment Street. Having been so late in the morning, Mrs. Fausset ignored breakfast, and only made her appearance in time for lunch, when her husband came in from his ride. He had escorted her to the first of her parties, and had left her on the way to the second, to go and finish his evening in the House, which he found much more interesting than society.

They met at luncheon, and talked of their previous night's experiences, and of different matters. Not a word about the expected presence which was so soon to disturb their domestic

calm. Mr. Fausset affected cheerfulness, yet was evidently out of spirits. He looked round the picturesque old oak dining-room wistfully; he strolled into the inner room, with its dwarf book-cases, pictures, and bronzes, its cosy corner behind a sixfold Indian screen, a century-old screen, bought at Christie's out of a famous collection. He surveyed this temple of domestic peace, and wondered within himself whether it would be quite as peaceful when a new presence was among them.

"Surely a girl of fourteen can make no difference," he argued, "even if she has a peculiar temper. If she is inclined to be troublesome, she shall be made to keep herself to herself. Maud shall not be rendered unhappy by her."

He went out soon after lunch and came home again at afternoon tea-time in a hansom, with a girl in a black frock. A four-wheeler followed with a large trunk and two smaller boxes. The splendid creatures in knee-breeches and powder, who opened the door had been ordered to deny their mistress to everybody, so Mrs. Fausset was taking tea alone in her morning-room.

The morning-room occupied the whole front of the second floor, a beautiful room, with three windows, the centre a large bow, jutting out over empty space. This bow window had been added when Mr. Fausset married, on a suggestion from his *fiancée*. It spoiled the external appearance of the house, but it made the room delightful. For furniture and decoration there was everything pretty, novel, eccentric, and expensive that Maud Fausset had ever been able to think of. She had only stopped her caprices and her purchases when the room would not hold another thing of beauty. There was a confusion of form and colour, but the general effect was charming; and Mrs. Fausset, in a loose white muslin gown, suited the room just as the room suited Mrs. Fausset.

She was sitting in the bow window, in a semicircle of flowers and amidst the noises of the West End world, waiting for her husband and the new-comer, nervous and apprehensive. The scarlet Japanese tea-table stood untouched, the water bubbling in the quaint little bronze tea-kettle, swinging between a pair of rampant dragons.

She started as the door opened, but kept her seat. She did not want to spoil the new-comer by an undue appearance of interest.

John Fausset came into the room leading a pale girl, dressed in black. She was tall for her age, and very thin, and her small face had a pinched look, which made the great black eyes look larger. She was a peculiar looking girl, with an olive tint in her complexion which hinted at a lineage not altogether English. She was badly dressed in the best materials, and had a look of never having been much cared for since she was born.

"This is Fay," said Mr. Fausset, trying to be cheerful.

His wife held out her hand, which the girl took coldly, but not shyly. She had an air of being perfectly self-possessed.

"Her name is Fay, is it? What a pretty name. By-the-by, you did not tell me her surname."

"Did I not? Her name is Fausset. She is a distant relation of my family."

"I did not understand that last night," said Mrs. Fausset with a puzzled air. "You only talked of a friend."

"Was that so? I should have said a family connection. Yes, Fay and I are namesakes, and kindred."

He patted the girl's shoulder caressingly, and made her sit down by the little red table in front of the tea-cups, and cakes, and buns. The buns reminded him of his daughter.

"Where is Mildred?"

"She is at her music lesson; but she will be here in a minute or two, no doubt," answered his wife.

"Poor little mite, to have to begin lessons so soon; the chubby little fingers stuck down upon the cold hard keys. The piano is so uninviting at seven years old, such a world of labour for such a small effect. If she could turn a barrel-organ, with a monkey on the top, I'm sure she would like music ever so much better; and after a year or two of grinding it would dawn upon her that there was something wanting in that kind of music, and then she would attack the piano of her own accord, and its difficulties would not seem so hopelessly uninteresting. Are you fond of lessons, Fay?"

"I hate them," answered the girl, with vindictive emphasis.

"And I suppose you hate books too," said Mrs. Fausset rather scornfully.

"No, I love books."

She looked about the bright, spacious room, curiously, with admiring eyes. People who came from very pretty rooms were lost in admiration at Mrs. Fausset's morning-room, with its heterogeneous styles of art—here Louis seize—there Japanese—Italian on one side—Turkish on the other. What a dazzling effect then it must needs have upon this girl, who had spent the last five years of her life amidst the barren surroundings of a suburban school.

"What a pretty room!" she exclaimed at last.

"Don't you think my wife was made to live in pretty rooms?" asked Fausset, touching Maud's delicate hand as it moved among the tea things.

"She is very pretty herself," said Fay bluntly.

"Yes, and all things about her should be pretty—this thing for instance," as Mildred came bounding into the room and clambered on her father's knee. "This is my daughter, Fay, and your play-fellow if you know how to play."

"I'm afraid I don't, for they always snubbed us for anything

like play," answered the stranger, "but Mildred shall teach me if she will."

She had learnt the child's name from Mr. Fausset during the drive from Streatham Common to Upper Parchment Street.

Mildred stretched out her little hand to the girl in black with somewhat of a patronizing air. She had lived all her little life among bright colours and beautiful objects, in a kind of butterfly world, and she concluded that this pale girl in sombre raiment must needs be poor and unhappy. She looked her prettiest, smiling down at the stranger from her father's shoulder, where she hung fondly. She looked like a cherub in a picture by Rubens, red-lipped, with eyes of azure, and flaxen hair just touched with gold, and a complexion of dazzling lily and carnation colour suffused with light.

"I mean to give you my very best doll," she said.

"You darling, how I shall adore you," cried the strange girl impulsively, rising from her seat at the tea table, and clasping Mildred in her arms.

"That is as it should be," said Fausset, patting Fay's shoulder affectionately. "Let there be a bond of love between you two."

"And will you play with me, and learn your lessons with me, and sleep in my room?" asked Mildred coaxingly.

"No, darling. Fay will have a room of her own," said Mrs. Fausset, replying to the last inquiry. "It is much nicer for girls to have rooms to themselves."

"No, it isn't," answered Mildred, with a touch of petulance that was pretty in so lovely a child. "I want Fay to sleep with me. I want her to tell me stories every night."

"You have mother to tell you stories, Mildred," said Mrs. Fausset, already inclined to be jealous.

"Not every night. Mother goes to parties almost every night."

"Not at The Hook, love."

"Oh, but at The Hook there's always company. Why can't I have Fay to tell me stories every night?" urged the child persistently.

"I don't see why they should not be together, Maud," said Mr. Fausset, always prone to indulge Mildred's lightest whim.

"It is better that Fay should have a room of her own for a great many reasons," replied his wife with a look of displeasure.

"Very well, Maud, so be it," he answered, evidently desiring to conciliate her. "And which room is Fay to have?"

"I have given her Bell's room."

Mr. Fausset's countenance fell.

"Bell's room—a servant's room"—he repeated blankly.

"It is very inconvenient for Bell, of course," said Mrs. Fausset. "She will have to put up an extra bed in the housemaid's room ;

and as she has always been used to a room of her own, she made herself rather disagreeable about the change."

Mr. Fausset was silent, and seemed thoughtful. Mildred had pulled Fay away from the table and led her to a distant window, where a pair of Virginian love-birds were twittering in their gilded cage, half hidden amidst the bank of feathery white spirea and yellow marguerites which filled the recess.

"I should like to see the room," said Fausset presently, when his wife had put down her tea cup.

"My dear John, why should you trouble yourself about such a detail?"

"I want to do my duty to the girl—if I can."

"I think you might trust such a small matter to *me*, or even to my housekeeper," Maud Fausset answered with an offended air. "However, you are quite at liberty to make a personal inspection. Bell is very particular, and any room she occupied is sure to be nice. But you can judge for yourself. The room is on the same floor as Mildred's."

This last remark implied that to occupy any apartment on that floor must be a privilege.

"But not with the same aspect."

"Isn't it? No, I suppose not. The windows look the other way," said Mrs. Fausset innocently.

She was not an over-educated person. She adored Keats, Shelley, and Browning, and talked about them learnedly in a way; but she hardly knew the points of the compass.

She sauntered out of the room, a picture of languid elegance in her flowing muslin gown. There were flowers on the landing, and a scarlet Japanese screen to fence off the stairs that went downward, and an embroidered Algerian curtain to hide the upward flight. This second floor was Mrs. Fausset's particular domain. Her bedroom and bathroom and dressing-room were all on this floor. Mr. Fausset lived there also, but seemed to be there on sufferance.

She pulled aside the Algerian curtain, and they went up to the third story. The two front rooms were Mildred's, bedroom and schoolroom. The bedroom door was open, an airy room with two windows brightened by outside flower-boxes, full of gaudy red geraniums and snow-white marguerites—a gay-looking room with a pale blue paper, and a blue and cream-colour carpet. A little brass bed with lace curtains for Mildred—a brass bed without curtains for Mildred's maid.

The house was like many old London houses, more spacious than it looked outside. There were four or five small rooms at the back occupied by servants, and it was one of those rooms, a very small room looking into a mews, which Mr. Fausset went to inspect.

It was not a delightful room. There was an outside wall at

right angles with the one window which shut off the glory of the westering sun. There was a forest of chimney-pots by way of prospect. There was not even a flower-box to redeem the dinginess of the outlook. The furniture was neat, and the room was spotlessly clean; but as much might be said of a cell in Portland prison. A narrow iron bedstead, a couple of cane chairs, a common mahogany chest of drawers in the window, and on the chest of drawers a white toilet cover, and a small mahogany looking-glass. A deal washstand and a zinc bath. These are not luxurious surroundings; and Mr. Fausset's countenance did not express approval.

"I am sure it is quite as nice a room as she would have at any boarding school," said his wife, answering that disapproving look.

"Perhaps; but I want her to feel as if she were not at school, but at home."

"She can have a prettier room at The Hook, I daresay, though we are short of bedrooms even there—if she is to go to The Hook with us."

"Why of course she is to go with us. She is to live with us till she marries."

Mrs. Fausset sighed, and looked profoundly melancholy.

"I don't think we shall get her married very easily," she said.

"Why not?" asked her husband quickly, looking at her anxiously as he spoke.

"She is so remarkably plain."

"Did she strike you so? I think her rather pretty; or at least interesting. She has magnificent eyes."

"So has an owl in an ivy bush," exclaimed Mrs. Fausset petulantly. "Those great black eyes in that small pale face are positively repulsive. However, I don't want to depreciate her. She is of your kith and kin, and you are interested in her, so we must do the best we can. I only hope Mildred will get on with her."

This conversation took place upon the stairs. Mr. Fausset was at the morning-room door by this time. He opened it, and saw his daughter in the sunlit window among the flowers, with her arms round Fay's neck.

"They have begun very well," he said.

"Children are so capricious," answered his wife.

CHAPTER III.

A SUPERIOR PERSON.

MILDRED and her father's ward got on remarkably well, perhaps a little too well to please Mrs. Fausset, who had been jealous of the

new-comer, and resentful of her intrusion from the outset. Mildred did not show herself capricious in her treatment of her playfellow. The child had never had a young companion before, and to her the advent of Fay meant the beginning of a brighter life. Until Fay came there had been no one but mother; and mother spent her life in visiting and receiving visits. Only the briefest intervals between a ceaseless round of gaieties could be afforded to Mildred. Her mother doted on her, or thought she did; but she had allowed her life to be caught in the cogs of the great society wheel, and she was obliged to go round with the wheel. So far as brightly-furnished rooms and an expensive morning governess, ever so much too clever for the pupil's requirements, and costly toys and pretty frocks, and carriage drives, could go, Mildred was a child in an earthly paradise; but there are some children who yearn for something more than luxurious surroundings and fine clothes, and Mildred Fausset was one of those. She wanted a great deal of love, she wanted love always, not in brief snatches, as her mother gave it, hurried caresses given in the midst of dressing for a ball, hasty kisses before stepping into her carriage to be whisked off to a garden party, or in all the pomp and splendour of ostrich feathers, diamonds, and Court train, before the solemn function of a Drawing Room. Such passing glimpses of love were not enough for Mildred. She wanted warm affections interwoven with the fabric of her life, she wanted loving companionship from morning till night; and this she had from Fay. From the first moment of their clasping hands the two girls had loved each other. Each sorely in need of love, they had come together naturally, and with all the force of free, undisciplined nature, meeting and mingling like two rivers.

John Fausset saw their affection and was delighted. That loving union between the girl and the child seemed to solve all difficulties. Fay was no longer a stranger. She was a part of the family, merged in the golden circle of domestic love. Mrs. Fausset looked on with jaundiced eye.

"If one could only believe it were genuine!" she sighed.

"Genuine! which of them do you suppose is pretending? Not Mildred, surely?"

"Mildred! No, indeed! *She* is truth itself."

"Why do you suspect Fay of falsehood?"

"My dear John, I fear—I only say I fear—that your *protégée* is *shy*. She has a quiet, self-contained air that I don't like in one so young."

"I don't wonder she is self-contained. You do so little to draw her out."

"Her attachment to Mildred has an exaggerated air—as if she wanted to curry favour with us by pretending to be fond of our child," said Mrs. Fausset, ignoring her husband's remark.

"Why should she curry favour? She is not here as a depen-

dent—though she is made to wear the look of one sometimes more than I like. I have told you that her future is provided for; and as for pretending to be fond of Mildred, she is the last girl to pretend affection. She would have been better liked at school if she had been capable of pretending. There is a wild, undisciplined nature under that self-contained air you talk about.”

“There is a very bad temper, if that is what you mean. Bell has complained to me more than once on that subject.”

“I hope you have not set Bell in authority over her,” exclaimed Mr. Fausset hastily.

“There must be some one to maintain order when Miss Colville is away.”

“That some one should be you or I, not Bell.”

“Bell is a conscientious person, and she would make no improper use of authority.”

“She is a very disagreeable person. That is all I know about her,” retorted Mr. Fausset as he left the room.

He was dissatisfied with Fay’s position in the house, yet hardly knew how to complain or what alteration to suggest. There were no positive wrongs to resent. Fay shared Mildred’s studies and amusements, they had their meals together, and took their airings together.

When Mildred went down to the morning-room or the drawing-room Fay generally went with her: generally, not always. There were times when Bell looked in at the schoolroom door and beckoned Mildred. “Mamma wants you alone,” she would whisper on the threshold, and Mildred ran off to be petted and paraded before some privileged visitor.

There were differences which Fay felt keenly and inwardly resented. She was allowed to sit aloof when the drawing-room was full of fine ladies, upon Mrs. Fausset’s afternoon, while Mildred was brought into notice and talked about, her little graces exhibited and expatiated upon, or her childish tastes conciliated. Fay would sit looking at one of the art books piled upon a side table, or turning over photographs and prints in a portfolio. She never talked unless spoken to, or did anything to put herself forward.

Sometimes an officious visitor would notice her.

“What a clever-looking girl. Who is she?” asked a prosperous dowager, whose own daughters were all planted out in life, happy wives and mothers, and who could afford to interest herself in stray members of the human race.

“She is a ward of my husband’s, Miss Fausset.”

“Indeed. A cousin, I suppose.”

“Hardly so near as that. A distant connection.”

Mrs. Fausset’s tone expressed a wish not to be bored by the clever-looking girl’s praises. People soon perceived that Miss

Fausset was to be taken no more notice of than a piece of furniture. She was there for some reason known to Mr. and Mrs. Fausset, but she was not there because she was wanted—except by Mildred. Everybody could see that Mildred wanted her. Mildred would run to her as she sat apart, and clamber on her knee, and hang upon her, and whisper and giggle with her, and warm the statue into life. Mildred would carry her tea and cakes, and make a loving fuss about her in spite of all the world.

Bell was a power in the house in Upper Parchment Street. She was that kind of old servant who is as bad as a mother-in-law, perhaps worse; for your mother-in-law is a lady by breeding and education, and is in somewise governed by reason, while your trustworthy old servant is apt to be a creature of impulse influenced only by feeling. Bell was a woman of strong feelings, devotedly attached to Mrs. Fausset.

Twenty-seven years ago, when Maud Donfrey was an infant, Martha Bell was the young wife of the head gardener at Castle-Connell. The gardener and his wife lived at one of the lodges, near the bank of the Shannon, and were altogether superior people for their class. Martha had been a lace-maker at Limerick, and was fairly educated. Patrick Bell was less refined, and had no ideas beyond his garden; but he was honest, sober, and thoroughly respectable. He seldom read the newspapers, and had never heard of Home Rule or the three F's.

Their first child died within three weeks of its birth, and a wet nurse being wanted at the great house for Lady Castle-Connor's seventh baby, Mrs. Bell was chosen as altogether the best person for that confidential office. She went to live at the great white house in the beautiful gardens near the river. It was only a temporary separation, she told Patrick; and Patrick took courage at the thought that his wife would return to him as soon as Lady Castle-Connor's daughter was weaned, while in the meantime he was to enjoy the privilege of seeing her every Sunday afternoon; but somehow it happened that Martha Bell never went back to the commonly-furnished little rooms in the lodge or to the coarse-handed husband.

Martha Bell was a woman of strong feelings. She grieved passionately for her dead baby, and she took the stranger's child reluctantly to her aching breast. But babies have a way of getting themselves loved, and one baby will creep into the place of another unawares. Before Mrs. Bell had been at the great house three months she idolized her nursling. By the time she had been there a year she felt that life would be unbearable without her foster-child. Fortunately for her, she seemed as necessary to the child as the child was to her. Maud was delicate, fragile, lovely and evanescent of aspect. Lady Donfrey had lost two out of her brood partly, she feared, from carelessness

in the nursery. Bell was devoted to her charge, and Bell was entreated to remain for a year or two at least.

Bell consented to remain for a year; she became accustomed to the plenty and refinements of a nobleman's house, she hated the lodge, and she cared very little for her husband. It was a relief to her when Patrick Bell sickened of his empty cottage and took it into his head to emigrate to Canada, where he had brothers and sisters settled already. He and his wife parted in the friendliest spirit, with some ideas of reunion years hence, when the Honourable Maud should have outgrown the need of a nurse. Mrs. Bell lived at the great white house until Maud Donfrey left Castle-Connell as the bride of John Fausset. She went before her mistress to the house in Upper Parchment Street, and was there when the husband and wife arrived after their Continental honeymoon. From that hour she remained in possession at The Hook, Surrey, or at Upper Parchment Street, or at any temporary abode by sea or lake. Bell was always a power in Mrs. Fausset's life, ruling over the other servants, dictating and fault-finding in a quiet respectful way, discovering the weak side of everybody's character and getting to the bottom of everybody's history. The servants hated her, and bowed down before her. Mrs. Fausset was fond of her as a part of her own childhood, remembering that great love which had watched through all her infantine illnesses and delighted in all her childish joys. Yet even despite these fond associations, there were times when Maud Fausset thought that it would be a good thing if dear old Bell would accept a liberal pension and go and live in some rose and honeysuckle cottage among the summery meadows by the Thames. Mrs. Fausset had only seen that river-side region in summer, and she had hardly realized the stern fact of winter in that district. She never thought of rheumatism in connection with one of those low white-walled cottages, half hidden under overhanging thatched gables and curtained with woodbine and passion flower, rose and myrtle. Dear old Bell was forty-eight, straight as a ramrod, very thin, with sharp features, and quick, eager grey eyes, under bushy iron-grey brows. She had thick iron-grey hair, and she never wore a cap. That was one of her privileges, and a mark of demarcation between her and the other servants; that and her afternoon gown of black silk or satin.

She had no specific duties in the house, but had something to say about everything. Mrs. Fausset's French maid and Mildred's German maid were at one in their detestation of Bell; but both were eminently civil to that authority.

From the hour of Fay's advent in Upper Parchment Street Bell had set her face against her. In the first place, she had not been taken into Mr. and Mrs. Fausset's confidence about the girl. She had not been consulted or appealed to in any way; and, in the second place, she had not been told that her bedroom would

be wanted for the new-comer, and that she must henceforward share a room with one of the housemaids, an indignity which this superior person keenly felt.

Nor did Fay do anything to conciliate this domestic authority. Fay disliked Bell as heartily as Bell disliked Fay. She refused all offers of service from the confidential servant, and when Bell offered to help in unpacking her boxes—perhaps with some idea of peering into those details of a girl's possessions which in themselves constitute a history—Fay declined her help curtly and shut the door in her face.

Bell had sounded her mistress, but had obtained the scantiest information from that source. A distant connection of Mr. Fausset's; his ward; an heiress. Not one detail beyond this could Bell extract from her mistress, who had never kept a secret from her. Evidently Mrs. Fausset knew no more.

"I must say, ma'am, that for an heiress, the child has been sadly neglected;" Bell told her mistress. "Her under-linen was all at sixes and sevens till I took it in hand, and she came to this house with her left boot worn down at heel. Her drawers are stuffed with clothes, but many of them are out of repair, and she is such a wilful young lady that she will hardly let *me* touch her things."

Bell had a habit of emphasizing personal pronouns that referred to herself.

"You must do whatever you think proper about her clothes, whether she likes it or not," answered Mrs. Fausset, standing before her glass, and giving final touches to the feathery, golden hair which her maid had arranged a few minutes before. "If she wants new things you can buy them for her from any of my tradespeople. Mr. Fausset says she is to be looked after in every way. You had better not go to Bond Street for her under-linen. Oxford Street will do; and you need not go to Stephanie for her hats. She is such a very plain girl that it would be absurd—cruel even—to dress her like Mildred."

"Yes, indeed, it would, ma'am," assented Bell, and then she pursued musingly: "If it was a good school she was at, all I can say is that the wardrobe-woman was a very queer person to send any pupil away with her linen in such a neglected state. And as for her education, Miss Colville says she is shockingly backward. Miss Mildred knows more geography and more grammar than that great overgrown girl of fourteen."

Mrs. Fausset sighed.

"Yes, Bell, she has evidently been neglected; but her education matters very little. It is her disposition I am anxious about."

"Ah, ma'am, and so am I," sighed Bell.

When Bell had withdrawn, Maud Fausset sat in front of her dressing-table in a reverie. She forgot to put on her bonnet, or

to ring for her maid, though she had been told the carriage was waiting, and although she was due at a Musical Recital in ten minutes. She sat there lost in thought, while the horses jingled their bits impatiently in the street below.

"Yes, there is a mystery," she said to herself; "everybody sees it, even Bell."

CHAPTER IV.

ALL SHE COULD REMEMBER.

THE London season was waning, and fewer carriages rolled westward to the Park Gates in the low sunlight of late afternoon, and fewer riders trotted eastward towards Grosvenor Square in the brighter sunshine before luncheon. Town was gay still; but the floodtide of gaiety was over. The river of London life was on the ebb, and people were beginning to talk about grouse moors in Scotland, and sulphur springs in Germany.

Fay had lived in Upper Parchment Street nearly two months. It seemed to her impatient spirit as if she had lived there half a lifetime. The life would have been hateful to her without Mildred's love. That made amends for a good deal, but it could not make amends for everything; not for Bell's quiet insolence, for instance.

Bell had replenished the alien's wardrobe. Everything she had bought was of excellent quality, and expensive after its kind; but had a prize been offered for bad taste, Bell would have taken it by her selections of raiment on this occasion. Not once did she allow Fay to have a voice in the matter.

"Mrs. Fausset deputed *me* to choose the things, miss," she said, "and I hope *I* know my duty."

"I suppose I *am* very ugly," said Fay resignedly, as she contemplated her small features in the glass, overshadowed by a mushroom hat of coarse brown straw, with a big brown ribbon bow, "but in this hat I look positively hideous."

The hat was an excellent hat, that good coarse Dunstable, which costs money and wears for ever, the ribbon of the best quality; but Hebe herself would have looked plain under a hat shaped like a bell-glass.

Fay's remark was recorded to Mrs. Fausset as the sign of a discontented spirit.

Not being able to learn anything about Fay's history from her mistress, Bell had tried to obtain a little light from the girl herself, but without avail. Questioned about her school, Fay had replied that she hated her school, and didn't want to talk of it. Questioned about her mother, she answered that her mother's name was too sacred to be spoken about with any stranger; and on

a subtle attempt to obtain intelligence about her father, the girl flushed crimson, started up angrily from her chair, and told the highly respectable Bell that she was not in the habit of chattering to servants, or being questioned by them.

After this it was war to the knife on Martha Bell's part.

Miss Colville, the expensive morning governess, was in some-wise above prejudice; and was a person of liberal mind, for a governess who had lived all her life in other people's houses, looking on at lives of fashionable frivolity in which she had no share, who had been obliged to study Debrett's annual volume as if it were her Bible, lest she should commit herself in every other speech, so intricate are the ramifications and interweavings of the British nobility and county families. Miss Colville was not unkind to Fay Fausset, and was conscientious in her instructions; but even she resented the mystery of the girl's existence, and felt that her presence blemished the respectability of the household. By-and-by, when she should be seeking new employment, and should have occasion to refer to Mrs. Fausset, and to talk of her pupils in Upper Parchment Street, there would be a difficulty in accounting for Fay. A ward of Mr. Fausset's, a distant connection. The whole thing sounded improbable. An heiress who had come to the house with torn embroidery upon her under-linen. A mystery, yes, no doubt a mystery. And in Miss Colville's ultra particular phase of life no manner of mystery was considered respectable.

In spite of these drawbacks, Miss Colville was fairly kind to her new charge. Fay was backward in grammar and geography; she was a dullard about science, but she could chatter French, she knew a little Italian, and in music she was highly gifted. In this she resembled Mildred, who adored music, and had taken her first lessons on the piano as a water-fowl takes to a pond, joyously, as to her native element. Fay was not advanced in the technique of the art, but she played and sang charmingly, for the most part by ear; and she used to play and sing to Mildred in the summer twilight, till Bell came like a prison-warder and insisted upon Mildred's going to bed.

"I nursed your mamma, miss," she would say, "and *I* never allowed her to spoil her complexion with late hours as Miss Fay is leading you on to do."

At seven Mildred neither cared for health nor complexion in the abstract, and she loved Fay's music and Fay's stories. Fay would tell her a fairy tale, with musical accompaniments, improvised to suit the story. This was Beauty's father groping through the dark wood. Then came the swaying of branches, the rustling of summer leaves, the long, long sigh of the night wind—the hoot of the owl, and the roll of distant thunder. Here came Fatima's brothers to the rescue, with a triumphant march,

and the trampling of fiery steeds, careering up and down the piano in double arpeggios, bursting open the gates of Bluebeard's Castle with a volley of tremendous chords.

"I never heard any one make such a noise on a piano," said Bell, bristling with indignation.

At eight o'clock Fay's day and evening were done. Mildred vanished like the setting of the sun. She would like to have had Fay to sit beside her bed and tell her stories, and talk to her, till she dropped asleep, but this happiness was sternly interdicted by Bell.

"She would keep you awake half the night, Miss Mildred, over-exciting you with her stories, and what would your pa and the doctors say to *me*?" exclaimed Bell.

The door of the bright, pretty bed-chamber closed upon Mildred, and Fay went back to the schoolroom heavy of heart, to enjoy the privilege of sitting up by herself till half-past nine, a privilege conceded to superior years. In that hour and a half of utter loneliness the girl had leisure to contemplate the solitude of her friendless life. Take Mildred from her and she had no one, nothing. Mr. Fausset had meant to be kind to her, perhaps. He had talked very kindly to her in the long drive from Streat-ham. He had promised her a home and the love of kindred; but evil influences had come in his way, and he had given her—Bell. Perhaps she was of a jealous, exacting disposition, for, fondly as she loved Mildred, she could not help comparing Mildred's lot with her own; Mildred's bright, airy room, and flower-decked windows, looking over the tree tops in the park, with her dingy cell overlooking smoky chimneys, and tainted with odours of stables and kitchen; Mildred's butterfly sashes of lace and muslin with the substantial ugliness of her own attire; Mildred's manifold possessions, trinkets, toys, books, games, pictures and flowers, with her empty dressing-table and unadorned walls.

"At your age white frocks would be ridiculous," said Bell; yet Fay saw other girls of her age flaunting in white muslin all that summer through.

Sometimes the footman forgot to bring her lamp, and she would sit in the schoolroom window, looking down into the street, and watching the carriages roll by in endless procession, with their lamps flaming in the pale grey night, carrying their freight to balls and parties hurrying from pleasure to pleasure on swift revolving wheels. A melancholy hour this for the longing heart of youth, even when the school-girl's future participation in all these pleasures is a certainty, or contingent only upon life; but what was it for this girl, who had all girlhood's yearnings for pleasure and excitement, and who knew not if that sparkling draught would ever touch her lips, who felt herself an alien in this fine house—a stranger at this fashionable end of the town? It was no new thing for her to sit alone in the twilight, a prey to

melancholy thoughts. Ever since she could remember, her life had been solitary and loveless. The home ties and tender associations which sweeten other lives were unknown to her. She had never known what love meant till she felt Mildred's warm arms clinging round her neck, and Mildred's soft cheek pressed against hers. Her life had been a shifting scene peopled with strangers. Dim and misty memories of childhood's earliest dawn conjured up a cottage garden on a windy hill; the sea stretching far away in the distance, bright and blue, but unattainable; a patch of grass on one side; a patch of potatoes on the other; a bed of wall-flowers and stocks and yellow marigolds in front of the parlour window; a family of hens and an arrogant and ferocious cock strutting in the foreground; and standing out sharply against the sky and the sea, a tall column surmounted by a statue.

How she had longed to get nearer that vast expanse of water to find out what the sea was like. From some points in the view it seemed so near, almost as if she could touch it with her outstretched hands; from other points it looked so far away. She used to stand on a wall behind the cottage and watch the white-sailed boats going out to sea, and the steamers with their trailing smoke melting and vanishing on the horizon.

"Where do they go?" she asked in her baby French. "Where do they go?"

Those were the first words she remembered speaking, and nobody seemed ever to have answered that eager question.

No one had cared for her in those days. She was very sure of that, looking back upon that monotonous childhood, a long series of empty hours in a cottage garden, and with no companions except the fowls, and no voice except that of the cow in the meadow hard by, a cow which sent forth meaningless bellows occasionally, and which she feared as if it had been a lion.

There was a woman in a white cap whom she called *Nounou*, and who seemed too busy to care about anybody—a woman who did all the housework and dug the potato garden, and looked after the fowls, and milked the cow and made butter, and rode to market on a donkey once or twice a week, a woman who was always in a hurry. There was a man who came home from work at sundown, and there were two boys in blouses and sabots, the youngest of whom was too old to play with the nurse-child. Long summer days in the chalky garden, long hours of listless monotony in front of the wide bright sea had left a sense of oppression upon Fay's mind. She did not know even the name of the town she had seen far below the long ridge of chalky hill—a town of tall white houses and domes and spires, which had seemed a vast metropolis to the eyes of infancy. She had but to shut her eyes in her evening solitude, and she could conjure up the picture of roofs and spires, and hill and sea, and the tall column in its railed inclosure—yet

she knew no more of town or hill than that they were on the other side of the Channel.

She remembered lying in a narrow little bed that rocked desperately, on a windy day, and looking out at the white sea foam dashing against a curious oval window like a giant's eye; and then she remembered her first wondering experience of railway travelling; a train flashing past green fields and hop gardens and houses; and then darkness and the jolting of a cab; and after that being carried half asleep into a strange house, and waking to find herself in a strange room, all very clean and neat, with a white, curtained bed and white muslin window curtains, and on looking out of the window, behold, there was a patch of common all abloom with yellow furze.

She remembered dimly that she had travelled in the charge of a little grey-haired man, who disappeared after the journey. She found herself now in the care of an elderly lady, very prim and strict, but not absolutely unkind, who wore a silk gown and a gold watch at her waistband, and who talked in an unknown tongue. Everything here was prettier than in Nounou's house, and there was a better garden, a garden where there were more flowers and no potatoes; and there was the common in the front of the garden, all hillocks and hollows, where she was allowed to amuse herself in charge of a ruddy-faced girl in a lavender cotton frock.

The old lady taught her the unknown tongue, which she discovered in time to be English, and a good deal besides. Reading and writing, for instance, and the rudiments of music, a little arithmetic, grammar, and geography. She took kindly to music and reading, and she liked to dabble with ink; but the other lessons were abhorrent, and she gave the orderly old lady a good deal of trouble. There was no love between them, only endurance on either side; and the long days on the common were almost as desolate as the days on the chalky hill above the sea.

At last there came a change. The dressmaker sent home three new frocks, all uncompromisingly ugly: the little old grey-haired man reappeared, looking exactly as he had looked on board the steamer, and a fly carried Fay and this guardian to the railway station on the common, and thence the train took them to a great dark city, which the man told Fay was London; and then they went in a cab through streets that seemed endless, till at last the streets melted into a wide, high road, with trees on either side, and the cab drove into a garden of shining laurels and rhododendrons, and pulled up before a classic portico. Fay had no memory of any house so grand as this, although it was only the conventional suburban villa of sixty or seventy years ago.

Just at first the change seemed delightful. That circular carriage sweep, those shining shrubberies with great rose-coloured trusses of rhododendron bloom, that golden rain on the laburnums, and the masses of perfumed lilac; all was beautiful. Not so

beautiful the long, bare schoolroom, and the willow pattern cups and saucers. Not so beautiful that all-pervading atmosphere of restraint which made school odious to Fay from the very beginning.

She stayed there for years—an eternity it seemed to her, looking back upon its hopeless monotony. Pleasure, variety, excitement she had none. Life was an everlasting tread-mill—up and down, down and up, over and over again. The same dull round of lessons; a dismal uniformity of food; Sunday penance in the shape of two long services in a badly ventilated church, and one long catechism in a dreary schoolroom. No gaol can be much duller than a well-regulated middle-class girls' school. Fay could complain of no ill-treatment. She was well fed, comfortably housed, neatly clad; but her life was a burden to her.

She had a bad temper; was irritable, impatient, quick to take offence, and prone to fits of sullenness. This was the opinion of the authorities; and her faults increased as she grew older. She was not absolutely rebellious towards the governesses; but there was always something amiss. She was idle and listless at her studies, took no interest in anything but her music lessons, and was altogether an unsatisfactory pupil. She had no lasting friendships among her schoolfellows. She was jealous and capricious in her likings, and was prone to fancy herself slighted or ill-treated on the very smallest provocation. The general verdict condemned her as the most disagreeable girl in the school. With the meaner souls among her schoolfellows it was considered an affront that she should have no antecedents worth talking about, no relatives, no home, and no hampers or presents. She was condemned as a discreditable mystery; and when one unlucky afternoon, a sultry afternoon at the beginning of a warm summer, she lost her temper in the middle of a class-lesson, burst into a torrent of angry speech, half defiance, half reproach, bounced up from her seat, and rushed out of the schoolroom, there were few to pity, and none to sympathize.

The proprietress of the school was elderly and lymphatic. Miss Fausset had been stigmatized as a troublesome pupil for a long time. There were continual complaints about Miss Fausset's conduct, worrying complaints, which spoilt Miss Constable's dinner, and interfered with her digestion. Really the only course open to that prosperous, over-fed personage was to get rid of Miss Fausset. There was an amiable family of three sisters, highly connected young persons, whose father was in the wine trade, waiting for vacancies in that old-established seminary.

"We will make a *tabula rasa* of a troublesome past," said Miss Constable, who loved fine words. "Miss Fausset must go."

Thus it was that John Fausset had been suddenly called upon to find a new abode for his ward; and thus it was that Fay had been brought to Upper Parchment Street.

No doubt Upper Parchment Street was better than school; but if it had not been for Mildred, the atmosphere on the edge of Hyde

Park would have been no more congenial than the atmosphere of Streatham. Fay felt herself an intruder in that splendid house, where amidst that multitude of pretty things she could not put her finger upon one gracious object that belonged to her—nothing that was her “very own,” as Mildred called it; for she had refused Mildred’s doll and all other proffered gifts, too proud to profit by a child’s generosity. Mrs. Fausset made her no gifts, never talked to her, rarely looked at her.

Fay knew that Mrs. Fausset disliked her. She had divined as much from the first, and she knew only too well that dislike had grown with experience. She was allowed to go down to afternoon tea with Mildred, but had she been deaf and dumb her society could not have been less cultivated by the mistress of the house. Mrs. Fausset’s feelings were patent to the whole household, and were common talk in the servants’ hall. “No wonder,” said the women; the men said, “What a shame;” but footmen and housemaids were at one in their treatment of Fay, which was neglectful and occasionally insolent. It would hardly have been possible for them to behave well to the intruder and keep in favour with Bell, who was absolute, a superior power to butler or housekeeper, a person with no stated office and the supreme right to interfere with everybody.

Bell sighed and shook her head whenever Miss Fay was mentioned. She bridled and wriggled with pent-up indignation, as if the girl’s existence were an injury to her, Martha Bell. “If I hadn’t nursed Mrs. Fausset when she was the loveliest infant that ever drew breath, I shouldn’t feel it so much,” said Bell, and then tears would spring to her eyes and chokings would convulse her throat, and the housekeeper would sympathize mysteriously with a mysterious trouble.

At the end of July the establishment migrated from Parchment Street to The Hook, Mr. Fausset’s river-side villa between Chertsey and Windsor. The Hook was an expanse of meadow and bordered with willows, round which the river made a kind of loop, and was not quite an island, but it was more than a peninsula; and on this enchanted bit of ground, spot loved by the river-god, Mr. Fausset had built for himself the most delightful embodiment of that much-abused word villa; a long, low, white house, with spacious rooms, broad corridors, a graciously curving staircase, with a double flight of stairs, meeting on a landing lit by an Italian cupola—a villa surrounded with verandahs, and looking out upon peerless gardens sloping to the willow-shadowed stream.

To Fay The Hook seemed like a vision of Paradise. It was almost happiness even to her impatient spirit to sit in a corner of those lovely grounds, screened from the outer world by a dense wall of Portugal laurels and arbutus, and with the blue water and the low, flat meadows of the further shore for her only prospect.

Miss Colville was left behind in London. For Fay and Mildred

life was a perpetual holiday. Mrs. Fausset was almost as much in society at *The Hook* as she had been in London. Visitors came and visitors went. She was never alone. There were parties at Henley and Marlow and Wargrave and Goring. Two pairs of horses were kept hard at work carrying Mr. and Mrs. Fausset about that lovely river-side landscape to garden parties and dinners, picnics and regattas. John Fausset went because his wife liked him to go, and because he liked to see her happy and admired. The two girls were left for the most part to their own devices, under the supervision of Bell. They lived in the gardens, with an occasional excursion into the unknown world along the river. There was a trustworthy under-gardener who was a good oarsman, and in his charge Mildred was allowed to go on the water in a big wherry, which looked substantial enough to have carried a select boarding school.

This life by the Thames was the nearest approach to absolute happiness which Fay had ever known; but for her there was to be no such thing as unbroken bliss. In the midst of the sultry August weather Mildred fell ill, a mild attack of scarlet fever, which sounded less alarming to Mrs. Fausset's ear because the doctor spoke of it as scarlatina. It was a very mild case, the local practitioner told Mrs. Fausset; there was no occasion to summon a doctor from London; there was no occasion for alarm. Mildred must keep her bed for a fortnight, and must be isolated from the rest of the house. Her own maid might nurse her if she had had the complaint. "How could she have caught the fever?" Mrs. Fausset asked, with an injured air; and there was a grand investigation, but no scarlet fever to be heard of nearer than Maidenhead.

"People are so artful in hiding these things," said Mrs. Fausset; and ten minutes afterwards she begged the doctor not to mention Mildred's malady to any one.

"We have such a host of engagements, and crowds of visitors coming from London," she said. "People are so ridiculously nervous. Of course I shall be extremely careful."

The doctor gave elaborate instructions about isolation. Such measures being taken, Mrs. Fausset might receive all fashionable London with safety.

"And it is really such a mild case that you need not put yourself about in any way," concluded the doctor.

"Dear, sweet pet, we must do all we can to amuse her," sighed the fond mother.

Mild as the case might be, the patient had to suffer thirst and headache, a dry and swollen throat, and restless nights. Her most eager desire was for Fay's company, and as it was ascertained that Fay had suffered from scarlet fever some years before in a somewhat severe form, it was considered she might safely assist in the sickroom.

She was there almost all day, and very often in the night. She read to Mildred, and sang to her, and played with her, and indulged every changing fancy and caprice of sickness. Her love was inexhaustible, indefatigable, for ever on the watch. If Mildred woke from a feverish dream in the deep of night, with a little agitated sob or cry, she found a figure in a white dressing-gown bending over her, and loving arms encircling her before she had time to feel frightened. Fay slept in a little dressing-room opening out of Mildred's large, airy bedroom, so as to be near her darling. It was a mere closet, with a truckle bed brought down from the servants' attic; but it was good enough for Fay, whose only thought was of the child who loved her as none other had ever loved within her memory.

Mrs. Fausset was prettily anxious about her child. She would come to Mildred's room in her dressing-gown before her leisurely morning toilet, to hear the last report. She would sit by the bed for five minutes showering kisses on the pale cheeks, and then she would go away to her long summer day of frivolous pleasures and society talk. Ripples of laughter and snatches of speech came floating in at the open windows; and at Mildred's behest Fay would stand at a window and report the proceedings of this happy world outside.

"They are going out in the boat. They are going to have tea on the lawn. Your mamma is walking up and down with Sir Horace Clavering. The Misses Grenville are playing croquet;" and so on, and so on, all day.

Mildred tossed about on her pretty white bed impatiently.

"It is very horrid being shut up here on these fine days," she said; "or it would be horrid without you, Fay. Mamma does not come to see me much."

Mamma came three or four times a day; but her visits were of the briefest. She would come into the room beaming with smiles, looking like living sunlight in her exquisite white gown, with its delicate ribbons and cloudy lace—a fleecy white cloud just touched with rose colour, as if she were an embodiment of the summer dawn. Sometimes she brought Mildred a peach, or a bunch of hothouse grapes, or an orchid, or a brand new picture book; but beautiful as these offerings were the child did not always value them. She would push the plate of grapes or the peach aside impatiently when her mother was gone; or she would entreat Fay to eat the dainty.

"Mamma thinks I am greedy," she said; "but I ain't, am I, Fay?"

Those three weeks in the sick room—those wakeful nights and long, slow summer days—strengthened the bond of love between the two girls. By the time Mildred was convalescent they seemed to have loved each other for years. Mildred could hardly remember what her life was like before she had Fay for a

companion. Mrs. Fausset saw this growing affection not without jealousy; but it was very convenient that there should be some one in the house whose companionship kept Mildred happy, and she even went so far as to admit that Fay was "useful."

"I cannot be with the dear child half so much as I should like to be," she said. "Visitors are so exacting."

Fay had slept very little during Mildred's illness, and now that the child was nearly well the elder girl began to flag somewhat, and was tired early in the evening, and glad to go to bed at the same hour as the patient, who under Bell's supervision was made to retire before eight. She was now well enough to sit up all day, and to drive out in a pony carriage in the sunny hours after early dinner. Fay went with her of course. Pony and landscape would have been wanting in charm without Fay's company. Both girls had gone to bed one sultry evening in the faint grey twilight. Fay was sleeping profoundly; but Mildred after dozing a little, was lying half awake, with closed eyelids, in the flower-scented room. The day had been exceptionally warm. The windows were all open, and a door between Mildred's bedroom and sitting-room had been left ajar.

Bell was in the sitting-room at her favourite task of clearing up the scattered toys and books, and reducing all things to mathematical precision. Meta, Mildred's German maid, was sitting at needlework near the window by the light of a shaded lamp. The light shone in the twilight through the partly open door, and gave Mildred a sense of company. They began to talk presently, and Mildred listened, idly at first, and soothed by the sound of their voices, but afterwards with keenest curiosity.

"I know I shouldn't like to be treated so," said Meta.

"I don't see that she has anything to complain of," answered Bell. "She has a good home, and everything provided for her. What more can she want?"

"I should want a good deal more if I were a heiress."

"An heiress," corrected Bell, who prided herself on having cultivated her mind, and was somewhat pedantic of speech. "That's all nonsense, Meta. She's no more an heiress than I am. Mr. Fausset told my poor young mistress that just to throw dust in her eyes. Heiress indeed! An heiress without a relative in the world that she can speak of—an heiress that has dropped from the moon. Don't tell *me*."

Nobody was telling Mrs. Bell anything, but she had a resentful air, as if combating the arguments of an invisible adversary.

There was a silence during which Mildred nearly fell asleep, and then the voices began again.

"It's impossible for sisters to be fonder of each other than those two are," said Meta.

"There's nothing strange in that considering they *are* sisters," answered Bell angrily.

"Oh, but you've no right to say that, Mrs. Bell. It's going too far."

"Haven't I a right to use my eyes and ears? Can't I see the family look in those two faces, though Miss Mildred is pretty and Miss Fay is plain. Can't I hear the same tones in the two voices, and haven't I seen *his* way of bringing that girl into the house, and his guilty look before my poor injured mistress. Of course they are sisters. Who could ever doubt it? *She* doesn't, I know, poor dear."

She, in this connection, meant Mrs. Fausset.

There was only one point in this speech which the innocent child seized upon. She and Fay were said to be sisters. Oh, how she had longed for a sister in the last year or so of her life, since she had found out the meaning of solitude among fairest surroundings. How all the brightest things she possessed had palled upon her for want of sisterly companionship. How she had longed for a baby-sister even, and had envied the children in households where a new baby was an annual institution. She had wondered why her mother did not treat herself to a new baby occasionally, as so many of her mother's friends did. And now Fay had been given to her, ever so much better than a baby, which would have taken such a long time to grow up. Mildred had never calculated how long; but she concluded that it would be some months before the most forward baby would be of a companionable age. Fay had been given to her, a ready-made companion, versed in fairy tales, able to conjure up an enchanted world out of the schoolroom piano, skilful with pencil and colour-box, able to draw the faces and figures and palaces and woodlands of that fairy world, able to amuse and entertain her in a hundred ways. And Fay was her sister after all. She dropped asleep in a flutter of pleasurable excitement. She would ask her mother all about it to-morrow; and in the meantime she would say nothing to Fay. It was fun to have a secret from Fay.

A batch of visitors left next day after lunch. Mr. and Mrs. Fausset were to be alone for forty-eight hours; a wonderful oasis of domesticity in the society desert. Mildred had been promised that the first day there was no company she was to have tea with mamma in the tent on the lawn. She claimed the fulfilment of that promise to-day.

It was a lovely day after the sultry, thundery night. Mrs. Fausset reclined in her basket chair in the shelter of the tent. Fay and Mildred sat side by side on a low bamboo bench on the grass; the little girl, fairy-like, in her white muslin and flowing flaxen hair, the big girl in olive-coloured alpaca, with dark hair clustering in short curls about the small intelligent head. There could hardly have been a stronger contrast than that between the two girls; and yet Bell was right, there was a family look, an undefinable resemblance of contour and expression which would

have struck a very attentive observer—something in the line of the delicate eyebrow, something in the angle of the forehead.

"Mamma," said Mildred suddenly, clambering into her mother's lap, "why mayn't I call Fay sister?"

Mrs. Fausset started, and flushed crimson.

"What nonsense, child. Why, because it would be most ridiculous."

"But she is my sister," urged Mildred, looking full into her mother's eyes, with tremendous resolution in her own. "I love her like a sister, and she is my sister—Bell says so."

"Bell is an impertinent person," cried Mrs. Fausset angrily. "When did she say so?"

"Last night when she thought I was asleep. Mayn't I call Fay sister?" persisted Mildred coaxingly.

"On no account. I never heard anything so shameful! To think that Bell should gossip! An old servant like Bell—my own old nurse. It is too cruel," cried Mrs. Fausset, forgetting herself in her anger.

Fay stood tall and straight in the sunshine outside the tent, wondering at the storm. She had an instinctive apprehension that Mrs. Fausset's anger was humiliating to her. She knew not why, but she felt a sense of despair darker than any other evil moment in her life, and yet her evil moments had been many.

"You need not be afraid that I shall ask Mildred to call me sister," she said. "I love her dearly, but I hate everybody else in this house."

"You are a wicked, ungrateful girl," exclaimed Mrs. Fausset, "and I am very sorry I ever saw your face."

Fay drew herself up, looked at the speaker indignantly for a moment or so and then walked quietly away towards the house.

She passed the footman with the tea tray as she crossed the lawn, and a little further on she passed John Fausset, who looked at her wonderingly.

Mildred burst out crying.

"How unkind you are, mamma," she sobbed. "If I mayn't call her my sister I shall always love her like a sister; always, always, always."

"What is the matter with my Mildred?" asked Mr. Fausset, arriving at this moment.

"Nothing. She has only been silly," his wife answered pettishly.

"And Fay—has she been silly, too?"

"Fay, your *protégée*, has been most impertinent to me. But I suppose that does not count."

"It does count, for a good deal, if she has been intentionally impertinent," answered Fausset gravely.

He looked back after Fay's vanishing figure with a troubled expression. He had so sighed for peace. He had hoped that the

motherless girl might be taken into his home and cared for, and made happy, without evil feeling upon any one's part; and now he could see by his wife's countenance that evil feeling had arisen with intensity; that the hope of lasting peace was at an end.

"I don't know what you mean about intention," said his wife. "I only know that the girl you are so fond of has just said she hates everybody in this house except Mildred. That sounds rather like intentional impertinence, I think."

"Go and play, darling," said Fausset to his child; "or run after Fay, and bring her back to tea."

"You show a vast amount of consideration for your wife," said Mrs. Fausset.

"My dear Maud, I want you to show a little more consideration for that girl, who has been so devoted to Mildred all through her illness, and who has one very strong claim upon a mother's heart. She is motherless."

"I should think more of that claim, perhaps, if I knew who her mother was, and what she was to you," said Maud Fausset.

"She was once near and dear to me. That is all I can tell you, Maud; and it ought to be enough."

"It is more than enough," his wife answered, trembling from head to foot, as she rose from her low chair, and walked away from the tent.

John Fausset looked after her irresolutely, went a few steps as if he meant to follow her, and then turned back to the tent, just as Mildred reappeared with Fay from another direction.

"We three will have tea together," said Mr. Fausset, with elaborate cheerfulness. "Mamma is not very well, Mildred; she has gone back to the house. You shall pour out my tea."

He seated himself in his wife's chair, and Mildred sat on his knee, and put her arms round his neck, and adored him with all her power of adoration. Her household divinity had ever been the father. Perhaps her baby mind had found out the weakness of one parent, and the strength of the other.

"Fay shall pour out the tea," she said, with a sense of making a vast sacrifice. "It will be a treat for Fay."

So Fay poured out the tea, and they all three sat in the tent, and were happy and merry—or seemingly so, perhaps, as concerned John Fausset—for one whole sunshiny hour, and for the first time Fay felt that she was not an outsider. Yet there lurked in her mind the memory of Mrs. Fausset's anger, and that memory was bitter.

"What am I, that almost everybody should be rude to me?" she asked herself, as she sat alone that night after Mildred had gone to bed.

From the open windows below came the languid sweetness of a nocturne by Chopin. Mrs. Fausset was playing her husband to

sleep after dinner. Sure token of reconciliation between husband and wife.

The doctor came next morning. He appeared upon alternate days now, and looked at Mildred in a casual manner, after exhausting the local gossip with Mrs. Fausset. This morning he and Mrs. Fausset were particularly confidential before the patient was sent for.

"Admirable!" he exclaimed, when he had looked at her tongue and felt her pulse, "we are as nearly well as we can be. All we want now is a little sea air to set us up for the winter. The great point, my dear madam," to Mrs. Fausset, "is to avoid all risk of *sequelæ*. A fortnight at Brighton or Eastbourne will restore our little friend to perfect health."

There were no difficulties in the way of such people as the Faussets, no question of ways and means. Bell was sent for, and despatched to Eastbourne by an afternoon train. She was to take lodgings in a perfect position, and of impeccable repute as to sanitation. Mildred was to follow next day under convoy of Meta, and the under-butler, a responsible person of thirty-five.

"Fay will go, too," exclaimed Mildred, whereupon followed a tragic scene.

Fay was not to go to Eastbourne. No reasons were assigned for the decision. Mildred was to ride a donkey; she was to have a pony carriage at her disposition; but she was to be without Fay for a whole fortnight. In a fortnight she would be able to come home again.

"How many days are there in a fortnight?" she asked piteously.

"Fourteen."

"Oh, Fay, fourteen days away from you," she exclaimed, clinging with fond arms round Fay's neck, and pulling down the dark head on a level with her own bright hair.

Fay was pale, but tearless, and said not a word. She let Mildred kiss her, and kissed back again, but in a dead silence. She went into the hall with the child, and to the carriage door, and they kissed each other on the doorstep, and they kissed at the carriage window, and then the horses trotted away along the gravel drive, and Fay had a last glimpse of the fair head thrust out of the window, and the lilies and roses of a child's face framed in pale gold hair.

It was a little more than a fortnight before Bell and her charge went back to The Hook. Mildred had sorely missed her playfellow, but had consoled herself with a spade and pail on the beach, and a donkey of venerable aspect, whose chief distinction was his white linen panoply, on the flat and dusty roads.

Mrs. Fausset was not at home to receive her daughter. She had a superior duty at Chertsey, where people of some social importance

were giving a lawn party. The house seemed empty and silent, and all its brightness and graceful furniture and flowers in the hall and on the staircase, could not atone for the absence of human life.

"Where is Fay?" cried Mildred, taking alarm.

Nobody answered a question which was addressed to everybody.

"Fay, Fay, where are you?" cried the child, and then rushed upstairs to the schoolroom, light as a lapwing, distracted with that sudden fear. "Fay, Fay!" The treble cry rang through the house.

No one in the schoolroom, nor in Mildred's bedroom, nor in the little room where Fay had slept, nor in the drawing-rooms, whither Mildred came running, after that futile quest upstairs.

Bell met her in the hall, with a letter in her hand.

"Your mamma wished to break it to you herself, miss," said Bell. "Miss Fay has gone."

"Gone, where?"

"To Brussels."

"Where is Brussels?"

"I believe, miss, that it is the capital of Belgium."

Mildred tore open the letter, which Bell read aloud over the child's shoulder.

"I hope you won't be grieved at losing your playfellow, my dearest pet. Fay is dreadfully backward in her education, and has no manners. She has gone to a finishing school at Brussels, and you may not see her again for some years."

(To be continued.)

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.

By JOSEPH FORSTER.

IN an attempt to analyze a character and genius like Thackeray's one is confronted with great difficulties and apparent contradictions. The ordinary conception of Thackeray as a cynic who delighted in exposing and ridiculing the imperfections and absurdities of human nature is not only superficial, it is erroneous and absurd.

It takes longer than some people think to see all round so all round a genius as Thackeray's. So many of us just see one point or part of a man of genius and conveniently ignore the rest; and the point we see so imperfectly is often a very trivial one. As Carlyle, with profound wisdom and insight, once said: "People should try to see before they pretend to oversee." That explains a great many of the absurd and contradictory opinions that persons who are not geniuses form on those who are. It is very difficult to understand a genius, and very easy to misunderstand and abuse him. Perhaps that is why so many people do so.

Thackeray made many efforts to be an artist before he found out that he was meant for an author. We all know the story of his sending some of his drawings to Charles Dickens, and offering to illustrate his works, which were then appearing in shilling monthly parts. But it was a long weary time before Thackeray's delicious works sold. The dedication of the "Paris Sketch Book"—a dead failure when it first appeared—to a Parisian tailor, with whom Thackeray lodged during his student days, is very touching, and does infinite honour to both. Thackeray, like most young authors, was very poor, and apologized for not paying his rent. His tailor landlord not only accepted the apology instead of the rent, but offered to lend Thackeray money.

Doubtless most of my readers have read the story in the preface to the "Paris Sketch Book," but it is such a beautiful tribute to the goodness of human nature that I could not resist the temptation to repeat it.

While we are considering this bright and beautiful side of the man so many foolish people call a cynic, let me tell a story that I am sure you have never heard before. I was once talking to the son of an artist who, some time after his father's death, met Thackeray on the knifeboard of an omnibus. Thackeray knew of the father's death, and that the widow had been left with several

children, poorly provided for. He inquired of the boy as to his mother's health, and gave him a heavy pill-box, telling him to give it to his mother with his kind regards. She was also to let him know if more medicine of the same kind was required. The pill-box was filled with sovereigns! Doubtless hundreds of cases could be cited of noble acts of generosity performed by this noble man with surpassing tenderness and delicacy.

But let us look at the worst side of the case. Take his almost ferocious "Book of Snobs." I should like every boy of fourteen in the kingdom to possess a copy; it would do them more good than all the twaddling goody-goody books ever written. Whom and what does Thackeray attack and deride in that unique book? The affected snobs, the proud prig, the hypocritical humbug. He never ridicules weakness, poverty, or innocence. His eyes filled and his pockets emptied at the sight of all human suffering and distress.

Thackeray loved children with all his great heart. He loved their laugh; he loved their play, and for a very simple reason: like a real man of genius he was a child at heart to the last day of his life. He loved to tip boys at school; he loved to the last to take children to the pantomime, and could always laugh at their laughter if not at the clown.

But although Thackeray was admired by such men as Carlyle and John Sterling, who thought the "Great Hoggarty Diamond" one of the best stories ever penned, he did not please "that great big stupid," the public, until he published one of the greatest, wisest, truest pictures of modern life extant, I mean "Vanity Fair." This took the reading world by storm, like "Pickwick," "Jane Eyre" and "Adam Bede," and no wonder. There is nothing finer in fiction than this wonderful work. The profound knowledge of human nature, the subtle analysis of character, the life, the humour, the tenderness, fun and irony are prodigious. And the manly love of justice and truth, and hatred of cant, affectation, cruelty and meanness are as remarkable as in Dickens himself. Becky Sharpe comes to grief; the snob Osborne is made ridiculous; poor Amelia is better treated, perhaps, than she deserves; but the manly, ugly, noble grocer's son, Dobbin, who looks up to the handsome snob Osborne, is one of the most beautiful creations in fiction. We laugh at him at first, but when we learn what a noble, honest, manly heart the ugly fellow with the big hands and feet has we love and bow down to him with respect and reverence.

Then the immortal Becky Sharpe. Her first struggles with sordid poverty, her cunning, her coquetry, and her utter want of principle, and that delightful scene in which she hooks and nearly succeeds in landing the fat Joe Sedley, are described with a rich humour, truth, and knowledge of human nature that have never been, and, I think, never can be, surpassed.

But if one wished to show the tender, beautiful, noble nature of Thackeray one would cite the finest gentleman in literature—Colonel Newcome. This character is Thackeray's finest. The unaffected simplicity, generosity, manliness and sweetness of this character are beyond the reach of praise. The scene at Evans', where some blackguards sing improper songs before the boy Clive, and thus arouse the wrath of the old colonel, is done as only Thackeray could do it. The death of the old man in the Gray Friars hospital is almost heart-breaking in its pathos.

What strikes me in Thackeray is his extraordinary charity and fervent admiration for everything good and great in character and literature. You all know that he said he loved Fielding so much that he would have blacked his boots for him. His admiration for Dickens was intense: he expressed it over and over again in his works. He would often call on Dickens and say: "Dickens, I have come to dine with you, and talk over your splendid new number."

The beautiful articles he wrote in the *Cornhill* on the death of Macaulay, of whom he said "he read a hundred books to write one sentence," Charlotte Brontë, and Nathaniel Hawthorne are full of enthusiastic praise, the tenderest feeling, and subtlest discrimination. He seemed to be utterly destitute of envy, which has been supposed to be a literary failing. I am afraid that failing is not confined to literary men and women.

The moral influence of Thackeray's works, in my humble opinion, has been enormous. I don't think the veriest snob in this country of snobs could read Thackeray without benefit. His books are pre-eminently wholesome and pure. He does not, by subtle sophistry, try to make the worse appear the better cause. With unerring moral instinct he separates the true from the false. He represents humanity as it is; he strips the mask from the hypocrite, and covers the humbug with contempt and ridicule. But when he describes Lady Castlewood, Ethel Newcome, and the poor victim of that smiling, bowing, flattering, unctuous scoundrel, Dr. Firmin, what infinite tenderness, delicacy and pity he displays.

Thackeray loved and hated with a force that would have delighted Dr. Johnson himself. His intense, almost passionate, earnestness reminds me of Carlyle. Thackeray's character, his intense personality, animates everything he touched. And the pains he took were enormous. He thoroughly believed, and acted on the belief, that easy writing is hard reading. He polished his prose more than some poets do their verse: he returned to it again and again. When the writer will not blot at all, the world is very likely to revenge itself by blotting all. A lover of Thackeray, which means a man of some culture, is never tired of his works. He reads them again and again with new

zest because the style is so delightfully clear and polished. He took up his manuscript time after time to touch and retouch till his fastidious taste was satisfied. After Thackeray's death his friends found some sheets of manuscript in his pocket-book scored and underscored twenty times over. The world is not so foolish as some sloppy writers appear to think, and appreciates care and finish. As a rule, the works that live deserve to live. The slap-dash style may last for a time, through the wonderful art of puffing, but it soon dies out. The "rubbish shot here" style is not, never was, and never can be successful. Many noble and beautiful works fail; but bad, vulgar work cannot survive. We all know Carlyle's definition of genius, as the infinite capacity of taking trouble; it is the finest I know.

Now, I will just quote a few pages of Thackeray. We are, I believe, all lovers of Thackeray, and, as good things are made better by being shared, we will add our admirations together, so to speak, till we reach a higher point of enjoyment and appreciation than we have reached before.

I believe with Goethe, who said, that before a man ventures to find faults in a work of genius he should prove his capacity to appreciate its beauties.

The following is a specimen of Thackeray's splendid vein of irony:

"ENSIGN SNOOKS' SPEECH AT WATERLOO."

"Suppose Ensign Snooks made a speech and said to the soldiers, 'Look at these Frenchmen, British soldiers,' says he, 'and remember who they are. Two-and-twenty years since they hurled their king from his throne and murdered him (groans). They flung out of their country their ancient and famous nobility; they published the audacious doctrine of equality; they made a cadet of artillery—a beggarly lawyer's son—into an emperor, and took ignoramuses from the ranks—drummers and privates, by Jove!—of whom they made kings, generals and marshals! Is this to be borne?' (Cries of No, No!) 'Upon them, my boys! down with these godless revolutionists, and rally round the British lion!' So saying, Ensign Snooks (whose flag—which he can't carry—is held by a huge, grizzly, colour-sergeant) draws a little sword and pipes out a feeble huzza. Then the men of his company, roaring curses at the Frenchmen, prepare to receive and repel a thundering charge of French cuirassiers. The men fight, and Ensign Snooks is knighted because the men fought so well."

To illustrate the fun, and honest, manly, satirical force of our author, let me introduce the following poem, and its parody:

"THE WILLOW TREE."

"Know ye the willow tree
Whose grey leaves quiver,
Whispering gloomily
To yon pale river?
Lady, at even-tide,
Wander not near it:
They say its branches hide
A sad, lost spirit!"

" Once to the willow tree
A maid came fearful,
Pale seemed her cheek to be,
Her blue eye tearful ;
Soon as she saw the tree,
Her steps moved fleeter ;
No one was there—ah, me !—
No one to meet her !

" Quick beat her heart to hear
The far bells chime
Toll from the chapel tower
The trysting time :
But the red sun went down
In golden flame,
And, though she looked around,
Yet no one came.

" Presently came the night,
Sadly to greet her,—
Moon in her silver light,
Stars in their glitter.
Then sank the moon away
Under the billow,
Still wept the maid alone—
There by the willow !

" Through the long darkness,
By the stream rolling,
Hour after hour went on
Tolling and tolling.
Long was the darkness
Lonely and stilly ;
Shrill came the night wind,
Piercing and chilly.

" Shrill blew the morning breeze
Biting and cold,
Bleak peers the grey dawn
Over the wold.
Bleak over moor and stream
Looks the grey dawn,
Grey, with dishevelled hair,
Still stands the willow there—
The maid is gone !

" Domine ! Domine !
Sing we a litany ;
Sing for poor maiden hearts
Broken and weary ;
Domine ! Domine !
Sing we a litany,
Wail we and weep we
A wild Miserere ! "

Now for Thackeray's parody :

" Long by the willow trees
Vainly they sought her,
Wild rang the mother's screams
O'er the grey water :
Where is my lovely one ?
Where is my daughter ?

" Rouse thee, Sir Constable—
 Rouse thee and look ;
 Fisherman, bring your net,—
 Boatman, your hook :
 Beat in the lily beds,
 Dive in the brook.

" Vainly the constable
 Shouted and called her ;
 Vainly the fisherman
 Beat the green alder ;
 Vainly he flung the net,
 Never it hauled her !

" Mother beside the fire
 Sat, her night-cap in ;
 Father, in easy chair,
 Gloomily napping ;
 When at the window-sill
 Came a light tapping.

" And a pale countenance
 Looked through the casement.
 Loud beat the mother's heart,
 Sick with amazement ;
 And at the vision, which
 Came to surprise her,
 Shrieked in an agony—
 ' Lor', it's Elizar !'

" Yes, 'twas Elizabeth—
 Yes, 'twas their girl ;
 Pale was her cheek, and her
 Hair out of curl.
 ' Mother !' the loving one,
 Blushing, exclaimed,
 ' Let not your innocent
 Lizzy be blamed.'

" ' Yesterday, going to Aunt
 Jones's to tea,
 Mother, dear mother, I
 Forgot the latch-key !
 And, as the night was cold,
 And the way steep,
 Mrs. Jones kept me to
 Breakfast and sleep.'

" Whether her Pa and Ma
 Fully believed her,
 That we shall never know :
 Stern they received her ;
 And for the work of that
 Cruel, though short, night,
 Sent her to bed without
 Tea for a fortnight.

MORAL.

" Hey diddle diddlety,
 Cat and the Fiddlety,
 Maidens of England take caution by *she*
 Let love and suicide
 Never tempt you aside,
 And always remember to take the dock-key."

The following charming little poem is, I think, very little known :

" FAIRY DAYS."

" Beside the old hall fire, upon my nurse's knee,
Of happy fairy days what tales were told to me !
I thought the world was, once, all peopled with princesses,
And my heart would beat to hear their loves and their distresses.
And many a quiet night, in slumber sweet and deep,
The pretty fairy people would visit me in sleep.

" I saw them in my dreams, come flying east and west,
With wondrous fairy gifts the new-born babe they blest :
One had brought a jewel, and one a crown of gold ;
And one has brought a curse,—but wrinkled, she, and old.
The gentle queen turns pale to hear those words of sin ;
But the king he only laughs, and bids the dance begin.

" The babe has grown to be the fairest in the land,
And rides the forest green, a hawk upon her hand,
On ambling palfrey white ; a golden robe and crown—
I've seen her in my dreams, riding up and down ;
And heard the ogre laugh—as she fell into his snare—
At the little tender creature who wept and tore her hair !

" But ever when it seemed her need was at the sorest
A prince in shining mail comes prancing through the forest :
A waving ostrich plume, a buckler burnished bright ;
I've seen him in my dreams—good sooth ! a gallant knight.
His lips are coral red beneath a dark moustache :
See how he waves his hand and how his blue eyes flash !

" ' Come forth, thou Paynim knight ! ' he shouts in accents clear.
The giant and the maid both shake his voice to hear.
Saint Mary guard him well ! he draws his falchion keen—
The giant and the knight are fighting on the green.
I see them in my dreams, the knight gives stroke on stroke,
The giant pants and reels, and tumbles like an oak !

" With what a blushing grace he falls upon his knee
And takes the lady's hand and whispers ' You are free ! '
Ah ! happy childish tales of knight and faërie !
I waken from my dreams, but there's ne'er a knight for me ;
I waken from my dreams and wish that I could be
A child by the old hall fire, upon my nurse's knee."

What tender, delicate, smiling grace there is about these lines.
Tears were mingled with the ink when Thackeray wrote them.

Now I will quote a few lines of Thackeray's sketch of Charlotte Brontë, prefacing her last fragment of a story—" Emma : "

" I saw her first just as I rose out of an illness from which I had never thought to recover. I remember the trembling little frame, the little hand, the great honest eyes. She gave me the impression of being a very pure, and lofty, and high-minded person. A great and holy reverence of right and truth seemed to be with her always—such, in our brief interview, she appeared to me. As one thinks of that life, so noble, so lonely, of that passion for truth, of those nights and nights of eager study, swarming fancies, invention, depression, elation, prayer ; as one reads the necessarily incomplete though most touching and admirable history of the heart that throbbed in this one little frame—of this one amongst the myriad of souls that have lived and died on this great earth—this great earth ?—this little speck in the infinite universe of God—with what wonder do we think of to-day, with what awe wait for to-morrow, when that which is now but darkly seen shall be clear ! As I read this little fragmentary sketch I think of the rest. Is it ? And where is it ? Will not the leaf be turned some day, and the story be told ? Shall the deviser of the tale somewhere perfect the

history of little Emma's griefs and troubles. Shall Titania come forth complete with her sportive court, and with the flowers at her feet, the forest around her, and all the stars of summer glittering overhead? How well I remember the delight and wonder, and pleasure with which I read 'Jane Eyre,' sent to me by an author whose name and sex were then alike unknown to me; the strange fascination of the book, and, how, with all my own work pressing upon me, I could not—having taken the volumes up—lay them down until they were read through. Hundreds of those who, like myself, recognized and admired that master-work of a great genius, will look with a mournful interest and regard and curiosity upon this, the last fragmentary sketch from the noble hand which wrote 'Jane Eyre.' ”

Did you ever read a more generous tribute of praise paid by one genius to another? And Thackeray did not wait till the poor author was dead to pay it. Thackeray told Mr. Smith of the firm of Smith and Elder, that “Jane Eyre” was a work of the greatest genius and originality, which only confirmed Mr. Smith's opinion. A noble cheque was sent, which quite astonished the modest little author, who was living in a little vicarage on a bleak hill-side in Yorkshire. Thackeray took every opportunity of enthusiastically praising the work wherever he went; and, I need not say that such praise went a very long way. And this man, whom I want you to love as well as admire, heartless and brainless noodles call a cynic!

Now a few words of self-criticism:

“Alexandre Dumas describes himself, when inventing the plan of a work, as lying silent on his back for two whole days on the deck of a yacht in a Mediterranean port. At the end of two days he arose and called for dinner. In those two days he had built his plot. He had moulded a mighty clay, to be cast presently in perennial brass. The chapters, the incidents, the characters, the combinations, were arranged in the artist's brain ere he set pen to paper. My Pegasus won't fly, so as to let me survey the field below me. He has no wings, he is blind of one eye certainly, he is restive, stubborn, slow; crops a hedge when he ought to be galloping, or gallops when he ought to be quiet. He never will show off when I want him. Sometimes he goes at a pace which surprises me. Sometimes, when I most wish him to make the running, the brute turns restive, and I am obliged to let him take his own time. I wonder do other novel writers experience this fatalism? They *must* go a certain way, in spite of themselves. I have been surprised by the observations made by some of my characters. It seems as if an occult power was moving the pen. The personage does or says something, and I ask, how the dickens did he come to think of that? Every man has remarked in dreams the vast dramatic power which is sometimes evinced; I won't say the surprising power, for nothing does surprise you in dreams. But those strange characters you meet make instant observations of which you never can have thought previously. In like manner, the imagination foretells things. We spake anon of the *inflated* style of some writers. What also if there is an *afflated* style,—when a writer is like a Pythoness on her oracle tripod, and mighty words, words which he cannot help, come blowing, and bellowing, and whistling, and

moaning through the speaking pipes of his bodily organ? I have told you it was a very queer shock to me the other day when, with a letter of introduction in his hand, the artist's (not my) Philip Fermin walked into this room, and sat down in the chair opposite. In the novel 'Pendennis,' written ten years ago, there is an account of a certain Costigan, whom I had invented (as I suppose authors invent their personages, out of scraps, heel-taps, odds and ends of characters). I was smoking in a tavern parlour one night—and this Costigan came into the room alive—the very man—the most remarkable resemblance of the printed sketches of the man, of the rude drawings in which I had depicted him. He had the same little coat, the same battered hat, cocked on one eye, the same twinkle in that eye. 'Sir,' said I, knowing him to be an old friend whom I had met in unknown regions—'Sir,' I said, 'may I offer you a glass of brandy and water?' 'Bedad you may,' says he, 'and I'll sing ye a song tu.' Of course he spoke with an Irish brogue. Of course he had been in the army. In ten minutes he pulled out an army agent's account whereon his name was written. A few months ago we read of him in a police court. How had I come to know him, to divine him? Nothing shall convince me that I have not seen that man in the *world of spirits*. *In the world of spirits and water I know I did*: but that is a mere quibble of words. I was not surprised when he spoke in an Irish brogue. I had had cognizance of him before, somehow. Who has not felt that little shock which arises when a person, a place, some words in a book (there is always a collocation) present themselves to you, and you know that you have before met the same person, words, scene and so forth?

"They used to call the good Sir Walter the 'Wizard of the North.' What if some writer should appear who can write so *enchantingly* that he shall be able to call into actual life the people whom he invents? What if Mignon, and Margaret, and Goetz von Berlichingen are alive now (though I don't say they are visible), and Dugald Dalgetty and Ivanhoe were to step in at that open window by the little garden yonder?

"Suppose Uncas and our noble old Leather Stocking were to glide silent in? Suppose Athos, Porthos, and Aramis should enter with a noiseless swagger, curling their moustachios? And dearest Amelia Booth, on Uncle Toby's arm; and Tittlebat Titmous, with his hair dyed green; and all the Crummles company of comedians, with the Gil Blas troupe; and Sir Roger de Coverley; and the greatest of all crazy gentlemen, the Knight of La Mancha, with his blessed squire? I say to you, I look rather wistfully towards the window, musing upon these people. Were any of them to enter, I think I should not be very much frightened. Dear old friends, what pleasant hours I have had with them! We do not meet each other very often, but when we do, we are ever happy to meet. I had a capital half-hour with Jacob Faithful last night, when the

last sheet was corrected, when 'Finis' had been written, and the printer's boy, with the copy, was safe in Green Arbour Court.

"So you are gone, little printer's boy, with the last scratches and corrections on the proof, and a fine flourish by way of Finis at the story's end. *The last correction?* I say these last corrections seem never to be finished. A plague upon the weeds. Every day, when I walk in my own little literary garden plot, I spy some, and should like to have a spud and root them out. Those idle words, neighbour, are past remedy. That turning back to the old pages produces anything but elation of mind. Would you not pay a pretty fine to be able to cancel some of them? Oh! the sad old pages, the dull old pages! Oh, the cares, the *ennui*, the squabbles, the repetitions, the old conversations over and over again! But now and again a kind thought is recalled, and now and again a dear memory. Yet a few chapters more, and then the last: *After which, behold Finis itself come to an end, and the infinite begun.*"

The curtain which separates this world from the next had grown very thin to Thackeray when he wrote those words.

The last quotation I shall trouble you with is a short poem which paints very beautifully the pathetic close of the noble and self-sacrificing life of Thackeray's most exquisite creation, Colonel Newcome.

"His golden locks Time hath to silver turned;
O Time so swift, O swiftness never ceasing!
His youth 'gainst time and age hath ever spurned,
But spurned in vain; youth waneth by increasing.
Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen.
Duty, faith, love are roots, and ever green.
His helmet now shall make a hive for bees,
And lovers' songs be turned to holy psalms;
A man at arms must now serve on his knees,
And feed on prayers, which are old age's alms."

After what you have just read, I hope, not for the first time, there can be no difference of opinion as to the nobility, beauty, and tenderness of Thackeray's genius.

No one can feel more vividly than I do the light and sketchy character of what I have written on Thackeray. I have not touched on the "Four Georges," one of the ripest, richest, and boldest pieces of historical, satirical writing I am acquainted with. His delightfully tender and humorous poems I have only glanced at.

What I have tried to do, in a short article, was to endeavour to point out the salient characteristics of our author's character and genius, and to attempt to destroy the vulgar and utterly erroneous opinion many people have of his cynicism. If I have proved to every one capable of feeling the effect of true and simple pathos that Thackeray possessed the power to touch the heart and conscience, and if what I have written will induce those who have read Thackeray as people ought to read Braddon and Ouida, that is, very skippingly, to read him with the care he deserves, the object I have had in writing this sketch will have been attained.

A CHANGELING.

By H. CHARTRES,

AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S WIVES," ETC.

I WAS peacefully at breakfast with my wife when we were disturbed by the arrival of a telegram. Of course my wife was agitated. To the ordinary feminine mind a telegram always portends death or disaster in some shape. The absurd thing is, I am not altogether free from some feeling of this kind myself—and breakfast is not the time for alarming intelligence. Indeed, the usual morning letters are quite bad enough, especially if addressed in that faultless handwriting apparently confined to copybooks and bills.

There are people I know who regard telegrams as a convenient substitute for the penny post—as a sort of shorthand system of correspondence. I have never attained this light and airy spirit. Even now they are reduced in price familiarity has not bred contempt; for, after all, a lot of unpleasant intelligence may be included in twelve words by a master of English. Personally, I have never ceased to regret the day when a weak Government yielded to the restless spirit of Democracy, and placed in the power of any thoughtless possessor of sixpence to unsettle one's mind for the day. After this digression it is only fair to admit that on opening this particular telegram I did not find its contents very alarming. It was from my mother-in-law, announcing her sudden indisposition.

Lest this should sound a little hard-hearted, perhaps I had better explain at once why this telegram did not cause us—or, at any rate, me—any serious anxiety. My mother-in-law is one of those women who are always suffering from something, that is undeniable, but what that something is, no one can ever definitely make out. I find this mysterious species of malady is very popular just now, and I do not wonder at it. It is not inconsistent with three hearty meals a day, nor does it interfere in any way with the sufferer's ordinary amusements, while giving him or her, it generally is her, though not always, an interest in himself or herself, as the case may be, and a right to unlimited sympathy from all friends and relatives. If the patient is a woman, it is generally known as nerves; if a man, liver is the more popular euphemism. Mind, I am not complaining of this frame of mind. It must be providential for the medical pro-

fession, but, with sixpenny telegrams in full swing, it may be carried too far. My wife, I found, did not take quite such a philosophical view of the situation as I did. Perhaps this was not to be expected. I fear she has not sufficiently cultivated the feeling, which all those who value their peace of mind should, as early as possible, that the maladies of others, in nine cases out of ten, are imagination. At any rate, she was inclined to be anxious. After some consultation, we agreed she should start off at once and stay the night with her mother, who lived a short way out of town, returning in the morning if she were well enough to be left. This was my wife's own idea, and although in my own mind I felt tolerably certain she would not find much the matter on her arrival, I did not try to discourage her from her proposed journey. My wife wanted to see her mother, and I should not be sorry to spend an evening at the club. When one marries one is very apt to get in a groove and lose sight of old friends, and what a treat a decent dinner would be ; for domestic joints, even under the treatment of a good plain cook, begin to pall after a time. I am not ashamed to confess to a weakness for nice little dinners. My mother-in-law says I am greedy, but that is only her pleasant way ; my attitude towards the good things of this life I should prefer defining as that of a *gourmet*. Our little weaknesses always sound better in French. In my mind's eye I was arranging a choice repast with one or two friends—not too many, I hate your big dinners—when I was interrupted by my wife asking me who was to look after the baby in her absence. This baby was, as babies go, rather a fine specimen—at least all my wife's lady friends so declared ; I do not speak with any confidence myself upon the subject. As a class, babies have always appeared to me uninteresting and curiously lacking in individuality. It has often struck me as odd that for the first few months of our existence, we, of all animals, should be so unpleasant. If you compare an average baby with a kitten or a puppy, it seems to me the baby has much the worst of the comparison. There is some amusement to be got out of the one ; but I cannot understand the most partial parent, even biased by an improbable resemblance to himself, extracting much entertainment from the other. This, however, is mere theory, and I think I convinced my wife at last, that among the many accomplishments of a barrister of seven years' standing the art of baby management had not been neglected, and she departed to catch her train in a state of comparative cheerfulness. My confidence in my powers of baby management would not have been so great, had I not been conscious of possessing a treasure of a nurse. Oddly enough, this nurse was the occasion of a slight difference between my wife and myself. She was certainly nice-looking, but as I argued, surely with some reason, was it fair to make the poor girl's face, in this case, her misfortune. I even ventured to suggest, on artistic

grounds, that a pretty servant, as such, was preferable, other things being equal, to an ugly one, as a pretty print, or piece of furniture. I do not fancy my mother-in-law—she was staying with us at the time—has much artistic perception, and she met these suggestions in a manner which, as I am speaking of a relative, I will only say was entirely uncalled for and showed a narrowness of mind. I did not see why I should give in, and I stuck to my point like a man, and in the end the girl was engaged.

Of course I was going to take every care of the baby, but I determined not to have too much to do with it personally. I should not know what to do, and my misdirected efforts might unsettle its mind for weeks. I felt that my care would be much better appreciated by proxy, in fact, through the nurse, so to her I confided the baby. In the course of the afternoon I found my way down to the club. There can be no doubt a decent dinner is a very pleasant thing every now and again ; and then, how pleasant it is to meet old schoolfellows one has not seen for years, and talk over old days ; though when I came to think it over afterwards, I failed to remember that Brown was quite such a prodigious swell at school as he declared that night at dinner. Of course it was a long time ago since we were at school together ; but, whatever our respective relations then were, I do not believe Brown was ever in a position to correct me with a toasting-fork (an anecdote in doubtful taste, told in a very loud voice—Brown has a loud voice).

I do not believe that head waiter has ever treated me with the same respect since. Still this may be fancy, and the dinner went off very well ; while at the whist-table afterwards, where Brown was my partner, I think I showed him that even a supposititious captain of a school eleven cannot disregard the ordinary rules of the game with impunity. It was past twelve when I got home. I had dressed at the club, and told the servants that no one was to sit up for me. Before going to bed, I listened carefully outside the nursery door. The baby seemed quite quiet, so I went to bed with a clear conscience. I did not sleep very well. My rubber kept working in with my dreams. About half-past one, I was aroused by a loud ring from a troubled dream in which my late partner, after trumping my best card, met my remonstrances by re-asserting his old school authority with the club poker. The bell went on ringing ; it seemed to be the front door. As no one, apparently, was inclined to answer it, I thought I had better go down and see what was the matter. Slipping on the clothes I had just taken off, I went down and opened the front door. Much to my astonishment I found a policeman on the door-step.

"Beg pardon for disturbing you, sir," said this official. "I thought you would like to know you have not a servant in the house."

This was rather startling. "What do you mean; where are they?" I asked.

"They are all at the dance," he explained. "I saw them come out of here and followed. They have a baby with them; I suppose it's yours."

This was too horrible. Could it be true? Was it not rather a continuation of my nightmare? This I could easily find out. Asking the policeman to wait, I rushed upstairs and found to my horror the baby gone. The policeman was right: my perfidious servants had betrayed their care. A crisis like this required prompt action; there seemed only one thing to be done, to go after the baby and rescue it myself. I put myself in the hands of the constable, who took me to the rooms where he alleged my domestics were enjoying themselves. On the way he assured me that this was by no means an unusual occurrence; that these particular rooms were very well patronized by the servants in the neighbourhood; it was not the first time that mine in particular had visited them. No doubt my wife being away, they thought the opportunity too good to be lost. They would discover their mistake. My policeman comforted me by informing me that the assembly was very select; that among servants no one under the rank of under-housemaid was admitted, and although an agitation had been prosecuted with some vigour on their behalf, the line had been firmly drawn at kitchenmaids. It did not take us very long to walk there. After about twenty minutes, I found myself opposite a dingy portico lit up with gas, through which we entered. There were a few loafers round the door who made way for us on seeing the policeman. We went up into a gallery, overlooking a large room in which the dancing was in full swing. The company may have been as select as my policeman suggested—I hope it was. There seemed a good many servants, I soon made out my own. There was my plain cook—would she had been as plain as her cookery, she might then have scorned their frivolity. There was my perfidious nurse, in a dress which really did my wife's taste great credit, and *this* was the place where my unhappy daughter—I do not know if I explained that the baby was a girl—was forming her first impressions of society. I could not make out the baby anywhere, and as I had not got up in the middle of the night to see my servants dance, I consulted with my policeman.

"Ah, baby. The babies are downstairs," he said.

"My good man," I exclaimed, "I only want one." He went on to explain that many of the lady patronesses, owing to their domestic arrangements, not having any one in whose charge they could leave their families, would sometimes bring them with them.

"Bless you," he said, "I have sometimes seen as many as a dozen. They are all kept together, and there is an old woman to

look after them. It's handy too for servants like yours; they don't like to leave one at home, or she turns sulky and lets out all about it."

It appeared to me I had better interview this old lady at once. By means of a gratuity I induced her to admit me into this chamber. The sight I beheld was certainly strange. One hears of baby shows. I have never seen one, but I should imagine them to be not unlike the sight exposed to my astonished eyes. I do not know how many babies there were. I suppose in reality there could not have been so very many; but in the shock of the moment they seemed endless. As I looked upon them something like despair filled my heart. My idea had been to carry off my baby, and to leave her frivolous nurse to return home crushed and conscience-stricken at her loss. This was not a bad plan, and there was only one difficulty in the way of its execution. Unfortunately that was an insuperable one—I could not tell which baby was mine. Babies never were my strong point; all these infants looked to me exactly alike. It is said to be a wise child that knows its own father. I think it would have puzzled Solomon, in spite of his experience as a family man, to have recognized a daughter under similar circumstances. The old lady in charge seemed to view my hesitation with some suspicion. Matters were becoming desperate; I eyed the assembly of infants carefully. Did I recognize one, or was it fancy? I approached it; it held out its hand and crowed. It was mine! Nature had asserted itself: with the unerring instinct of childhood it had recognized its father. This was better. I had really begun to fear I should have to call in the nurse to assist me: at any rate I was spared that humiliation. After satisfying the claims of the old lady and rewarding the policeman, I started on my return journey. My reception outside was genial, if somewhat derisive; still I bore no malice. I felt that the sight of a respectable gentleman in dress clothes, carrying a baby vaguely about in the middle of the night, was liable to provoke comment even of a jocular nature. The baby was very quiet on the way home, which rather surprised me. I suppose its unwonted dissipation had broken its spirit for the time. I put it in its cot and determined to go to bed myself and have the inevitable row in the morning. When the morning arrived my wrath had somewhat abated. I was not so angry as I ought to have been; in fact, on thinking the matter over, I was rather pleased with my share in it. I seemed to have acted with considerable address in a most trying situation, and had given the nurse a fright which would no doubt teach her a lesson. The matter too had its ludicrous side, which I always pride myself on seeing; so that altogether the nurse seemed likely to get off a good deal better than she deserved: still a little sternness would not be misplaced. It was intimated to me that the nurse wished to see me. I retorted with timely severity that I wished to see the

nurse. She came in, looking so frightened and in such evident distress that my firmness began to give way at once. Good nature was always my failing. Some people, for instance my mother-in-law, would have revelled in such a situation; yet I felt painfully conscious of an inability to rise to the occasion. I thought it judicious to let her begin.

"Oh, sir," she said, "it is a terrible thing."

This encouraged me: it seemed to show a fitting sense of her misconduct.

"Your conduct," I replied, "has been unpardonable."

I felt I was just becoming impressive when I was interrupted.

"Oh, it is not that."

"What do you mean?"

"It's the baby."

"Yes," I cried; "go on. Is there anything wrong with it?"

"The baby you brought home last night——"

"Yes, yes; go on."

At this point she burst into tears, and uttered these awful words:

"The baby you brought home last night was a boy!"

For some minutes I hardly know what happened. I declare that even now, years after all this has happened, I sometimes start up at odd moments with a thrill of horror. I tell my wife it's indigestion, but it is not: I am thinking once more of that awful moment. What could be done? How could I face my wife? I felt the necessity of calmness. I sent the girl away and endeavoured to consider the situation. It was not a pleasant one. If it had only been a girl it would not have been so bad. At that early age babies alter very quickly: even a day or two makes a great difference. My wife might never have discovered it. True, on growing up she would probably have developed democratic tastes and married the footman, but that one could have put up with. One thing was clear, my wife must not come home yet. To wire "Don't come—drains—will write," did not take long. The only advantage of telegrams is a little explanation goes a long way. This would at any rate keep her away until she got a letter from me. To gain time was what I wanted above everything.

I started off to the scene of last night's revelry, where there seemed just a chance I might hear about my own baby, or get some clue to its whereabouts, but all in vain. My inquiries proved fruitless. There was no baby there. They had all been duly claimed on that fatal night. However, I left my name and address, and made them promise to let me know if they heard anything of the missing child.

I returned home in despair. It must have been about the middle of the afternoon when there was a sudden ring at the front door. Then I heard a discussion going on in the hall. Apparently the servant seemed unwilling to let the caller, whoever he was, into the house. At last he was brought upstairs.

My visitor, as far as appearances could guide one, did not belong to the classes; he seemed rather one of those estimable people who toil and spin. His manner was rather diffident, and he displayed an anxiety about the disposal of his hat its intrinsic merit scarcely warranted. At last he selected a chair and sat upon it with an air of mystery. His opening remark seemed to justify this attitude.

"Boys is boys and gells is gells, and taken one with another there mayn't be much to choose."

Now as a piece of abstract philosophy this statement appeared unquestionable, but I confess I failed to detect its immediate point.

Seeing I appeared a little mystified he supplemented this aphorism by suddenly saying :

"I've come about a kid."

A light seemed to dawn on me.

"Do you mean," I asked, "that you have come to see me on some matter concerning a child?"

"You've hit it," said my laconic friend. By an ingenious examination in chief I managed at last to extract from his somewhat disjointed remarks that he had applied that day at the dancing rooms, and had been sent on to me. Then he suddenly resumed the discursive style.

"Between the two, to my thinking, there ain't much choosing; still, a boy can pick up odd jobs, and his keep comes to less."

There could be no doubt he must be alluding in some way to my unfortunate child.

"Do I understand you," I asked, "to mean you have a child which is not your own?"

My friend nodded, adding in a reassuring tone, "If you have any choice, you know, it don't matter so much, only my missus took on rather; still, with its clothes, let's say three pound, and make no more bones about it."

Apparently, this unnatural father imagined I had some occult plan of my own in changing the children.

At this moment a loud ring resounded through the house. Could this be my wife returned? I hurried to the window. No, there was but one person who could ring like that; it was my mother-in-law! She must not see this man or all would be lost. There was no time to spare, I must get him out of the way at once. This child he spoke of might be mine, and in that event all might yet be well. I explained to my friend that he must go now, but that if, later in the day, he would bring the child he spoke of and it should turn out to be mine, the money should be his. I then saw him safely down the kitchen stairs, just as my mother-in-law entered the hall. She looked very grim, and I felt the crisis had come: a want of firmness now would be fatal. She led the way into the drawing-room without saying a

word. I ventured to congratulate her on her recovery, intimating at the same time how glad I was to see her.

"I am not so sure of that," she replied. "I should imagine I am about the last person you would wish to see." She was not far wrong there.

"I assure you——" I began.

"Don't interrupt," she cried. "I am here because I know my duty as a mother. My poor child was too upset by your wretched telegram to think of coming here herself, but luckily she has a mother who not even on a couch of sickness can forget her sacred charge. I can see through your miserable subterfuges. My daughter shall not be imposed upon while she has still a mother to look to. What is the meaning of this?"

Here my diplomatic telegram was produced.

During this outburst I had reviewed the situation, and determined on a bold move.

"Madam," I said, "I regret, for your sake, that you should have been put to the inconvenience of the journey. Still, I am glad for my own, for it gives me the benefit of your experience in a trying situation. Of course I never expected you to be deceived by such an obvious device as my telegram."

"Then you admit that your telegram was untrue, and the drains all stuff?"

This I admitted.

"Then," said my mother-in-law suddenly, "who was that disreputable-looking man I saw going down the kitchen stairs, if he were not the drains?"

This was awkward. I had not been quick enough; she had seen him. With a presence of mind which surprised myself, I replied:

"Oh, that was an old college friend."

"What! in that dress, on the kitchen stairs."

"Well," I explained, "poor Smith always was eccentric; at present he devotes himself to slumming, and likes to go out by the kitchen; he says it keeps his hand in."

It's an astonishing thing how circumstances develop the most unsuspected traits in one's character. Hitherto, I should have said veracity was one of my strong points; yet here I found myself romancing away like a husband in a Criterion farce, and finding it not nearly so difficult as I should have anticipated.

"Then perhaps you will have the goodness to explain your extraordinary conduct."

"Certainly," I replied. "My wife, I felt, might be worried. She has not, indeed could hardly be expected to have, the strength of mind which only an experience like yours gives, an experience which, I may say, had I paid more attention to, would have saved all this annoyance."

My mother-in-law began to look mollified; I felt she was falling into my trap.

"In short," I said, "you were right, that nurse should not have been engaged. Her conduct during my wife's absence has been disgraceful. I thought the matter would worry her, and, perhaps foolishly, hoped to arrange it before her return—that was the object of my telegram."

An air of triumph came over the good lady's features.

"Was it so very bad?" she asked, in a tone which implied she would have been seriously disappointed had it not been.

I shook my head. It did not commit me to anything, and had the desired effect.

The day was won. After all, my mother-in-law was but mortal—she could not resist the temptation of saying, I told you so. This she did at some length. "That she had said so all along; she knew when she first saw the girl; she had warned my wife; it was no good, some people were always blind; it was the usual result of men meddling in what did not concern them," were all propositions I assented to humbly, yet with the air of one who has learned by experience the folly of putting his opinion against that of women in general and hers in particular. My surrender was so complete that the enemy began to show quarter.

My poor wife had of course been much upset by my absurd telegram, and if she — my mother-in-law—had not had sufficient devotion to rise from a couch of sickness to examine the matter, no one could have foretold the consequences. Still, as it turned out, matters might have been worse.

Then the enemy suggested seeing the nurse. This was a danger I had foreseen. Looking at my watch, "It is now four," I said; "at four-thirty a train leaves Charing Cross. Starting at once you can just catch it; explain this matter to my wife, as you only can, and bring her back this evening. If I may ask you to do this for me, my wife will be spared all further anxiety and there will be an end to all this worry."

My mother-in-law was not to be moved quite so easily. A railway journey to her mind was not a thing thus lightly to be entered on. It usually involved a prolonged wrestle with Bradshaw—an insight into the intricacies of which work she was firmly persuaded Providence had vouchsafed to her alone—and a great deal of that fuss preliminary without which most ladies find the shortest journey impracticable. Still the circumstances were unusual, and she consented to my plan after a little persuasion. When I saw her safely in a cab on her way to Charing Cross my spirits began to rise. So far, all had gone well. Of course everything depended on the baby my operative friend was going to bring me, but I felt my ill luck would be almost incredible if fortune failed me at the last moment like this. At the worst this baby was of the same sex as my own. The nurse I could easily get rid of before my wife's return, though I am ashamed to have to confess that I induced my mother-in-law to

depart mainly by representing that she could "have it out with her" (I believe the correct expression) equally well on her return. The other servants would be silent for their own sakes.

After some little time my friend returned, certainly carrying a baby. A baby, too, not unlike my own ; more I could not say. My parental instinct had betrayed me once ; nothing would induce me to trust to it again. I summoned the nurse :

"Is that my baby?" I demanded.

"Yes," she said.

"Are you absolutely certain? Are you prepared to swear to its identity?"

She declared she was.

"Then," I said, "I forgive you."

All had gone well. My preserver in a working-man's dress departed with his own child, grateful with his reward, though not without some qualms of conscience at having the money and the boy too. He even waited to explain on the doorstep that, as he was shortly expecting an addition to his family, he would always be ready to effect an exchange on the same terms. The nurse I parted with more in sorrow than in anger. In fact, I was so eager to get her out of the way at once that she got off a great deal better than she deserved.

The baby was brushed up and decorated, and I awaited the arrival of my wife with some equanimity.

My mother-in-law's first question was :

"Where is that hussey?"

I replied that on reflection I felt I could no longer keep such a servant under my roof, and that I had resolved to spare my wife the pain of dismissing her.

She looked at me very hard, but I met her gaze without flinching.

My wife was too glad to see her baby again to think of anything else.

"Poor dear," she said, "she looks very pale."

"My dear," I said, "you forget, she has missed her mother."

I wonder if I shall ever have the courage to tell this story to my wife.

A LIFE INTEREST.

By MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "AT BAY," "BY WOMAN'S WIT,"
"MONA'S CHOICE," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MRS. ACLAND MAKES UP HER MIND.

BRAND had established himself at Charing Cross, as directed by Mrs. Acland, and waited patiently for her promised communication.

It was a trying time for him. He could not employ himself, nor could any amusement divert him from the excitement of his own thoughts. He never went far from the hotel lest he might miss a note or a telegram, and sat alone for hours, anticipating the crisis he knew was coming, or recalling the past, its fatal mistakes, its errors, its shortcomings. There were hours when the mental and physical pain was almost more than he could bear. But a new and powerful motive lent him force; he was working for one dearer to him than himself.

At last the anxiously expected note arrived. It contained but four words, written in roughly printed characters. "Tomorrow evening after dusk." The date was the day before, and the line was unsigned.

When Brand had forced himself to swallow some dinner he paused in the entrance hall and said to the porter: "Should a lady inquire presently for Mr. Brand say I am in my room, No. 119, and ask her to walk up."

"Yes, sir."

"You will remember my name, 'Brand, 119,'" he repeated, and slowly ascended to the second floor. Here he had secured a comfortable bedroom. As soon as he reached it he put a match to the fire, which was laid ready, and lit the gas. Then he threw himself into an arm-chair, and sat very still, in deep thought. "If this cursed pain would keep off," he muttered, "I should be fitter for the work before me. I have a keen devil to deal with, and I dare not touch chloroform till the interview is over." He shivered and glanced at the door near him, which led into the adjoining room. "The window must be open in there, I feel such a draught." He moved his chair to the other

side of the fire-place, drawing the curtains and placing a small table by it before sitting down with his back to the window. "It is quite dark, and past six. I wish she would come," he said half aloud, and took up a phial which stood on the table, as well as a round leather case such as are fitted to bottles for chloroform and writing materials. "No"—looking at the bottle—"I must not." He put it down and almost immediately there was a low tap at the door. "Come in." Brand's voice sounded hoarsely, and an unwonted look of stern repugnance replaced his usual expression of kindly indifference as he stood up to receive his visitor, a tall lady in black with a thick black veil, who closed the door most carefully, then took a few steps into the room and very deliberately removed her veil. They both stood looking at each other silently for a moment or two, then Mrs. Acland, who, though pale, looked as composed and still as if her face was of marble, said in a low, clear tone:

"I hope you have a sufficient reason for putting me to the trouble and danger of meeting you. It has so chanced that my—that Mr. Acland went to the country to-day. I came to town on the plea of completing some arrangements omitted in the hurry of our departure. He is therefore aware I am in town and that I am to return to Folkestone from this station. Now, what do you want with me?"

"I have ample reason to give for troubling you to come here," returned Brand. "But it will take some time to explain; you had better sit down."

With a keen, comprehensive glance at the table and all that stood upon it Mrs. Acland took the seat pointed out, and loosened her fur-trimmed mantle at the throat, then sat quite silent, waiting for Brand to speak.

"In the first place," he began, "I saw the death of old Cranston Maynard's baby grandson in a paper I took up last Sunday."

"Well?"

"Have you so forgotten your former hopes and disappointments as not to see that, the child being removed, I am heir to his lands and wealth?"

"Ah!" she ejaculated. The colour rose to her cheeks in a vivid flush, she compressed her lips, but still kept silence.

"And after me they will be my son's and your son's—your son whom you have striven to crush—whom you have slandered."

"You admit then that he is your son."

"I told you before that I did, and I begged your forgiveness for the wrong I had done you. Then I removed myself out of your way, thinking *that* the best atonement I could make, for had I made myself known, I should only have dragged you and Dick from competence and respectability to comparative beggary and bohemianism. I little thought you

would return my self-effacement by shifting the blame and the shame of your theft to the shoulders of my boy. For *you* took that money, and I imagine I know the reason you wanted it."

"Your imagination was always fertile," returned Mrs. Acland, who had again turned very white, but met Brand's angry glance with deadly resolute eyes. "Pray, how has—our son" (a cynical stress on our son) "conveyed this information to you?"

"Because he has gradually told me his whole history during our daily companionship for more than a year."

"Where?" she asked incredulously, but there was a nervous catch in her throat and a more perceptible effort in her composure.

"At the various works in which we were associated. You know, I suppose, that your son became a mason." She bent her head. "Now, listen to me; I will be as short as possible. When, after the hideous discovery that Blake had introduced me to his cast-off mistress, and that you both succeeded in entrapping me, I believed, in my shame and despair—and not unnaturally—that your relations with that scoundrel had never been broken off, that the boy was his; had I not felt, from sundry suspicious circumstances, convinced of this, I should never have deserted you. I loved you, Judith, when we were married, and after, till your contempt for me, when you found there was no chance of my inheriting my uncle's property, opened my eyes to the evil of your nature. I know I was careless and extravagant and trying; but, had you loved me, had you even shown a sense of duty, you might have saved me."

"I did not think I should have had to listen to sentimental reminiscences," she said with a sneer.

"When I found who and what I had married," he continued, not heeding the interruption, "I grew utterly reckless; and my American friend Brand easily persuaded me to go with him to New Orleans. There I soon expended all I had and sank into depths of penury. Previous to that, I was going with my companion in search of some employment up the Mississippi when the wreck took place in which he was drowned. It was by accident that I was reported drowned and he among the saved. But I seized the chance of getting rid of a name I had disgraced. After buffeting for seven or eight years I fancied I'd like to come back, were it only to die in old England. When I reached London I had but a few shillings, and the day after, I had strolled in Regent's Park, and was debating whether the best way to spend my last sous would not be to buy enough opium to soothe me out of my worries once and for all." A curious light came into his listener's eyes, as he paused with something of his natural careless smile. "It was then," he resumed, "that I met Cranston Maynard, suddenly, face to face, and told him the condition I was

in. He threw me a sovereign. I met him by appointment after, and then, at his request, I undertook never again to reappear as Philip Cranston in consideration of an annuity of two hundred a year for life. I did not trouble myself about Dick's rights, as I did not believe him to be my son."

"Pray, what induced you to change your opinion?"

"It is curious. You remember the visit I paid you? Well, I declare to Heaven I did not intend to betray you or injure you by going—I would not, were it but for the sake of those unfortunate little children—unfortunate in having you for a mother."

"You are increasing your claims on my consideration every moment," she said bitterly.

"Be silent," he returned sternly; "you shall know in a few minutes how far you are dependent on mine. I thought that at the hour I called Acland would be safe in the city, and I was greatly taken aback to find myself intruding on a happy domestic festival. It was then that I saw Dick for the first time since he was a little chap of seven or eight; and I was not struck with any likeness to myself, but to the Cranstons generally. They are physically a fine race—I am somewhat different, smaller and darker; with your complexion, he is strikingly like my father. His voice, his expression, all spoke in favour of the belief that he is my own—my own son. Moreover, the likeness to ancestors is more convincing than even to the immediate parent. Believing this, and your explanation of certain circumstances in our last interview, I am going to forfeit Maynard's annuity and claim my rights. I fancy the loss of his grandson will have broken him down, and I want to get him to acknowledge me before his death complicates the affair."

"Perhaps he has a better life than yours," said Mrs. Acland uneasily, glancing at the bottles on the table. "Suppose he refuses to acknowledge you, how will you prove your identity? Shall you call *me* to witness on your side?"

"I know you would do your best to damn my cause," he returned calmly, "but Cranston Maynard is a gentleman and a man of honour. He will never deny what he knows to be true, even though he dislikes me—why, I cannot think, unless—" with a sudden flash of suspicion—"unless *you* made some mischief with him. Then he will see that Dick—my boy—is worthy to bear the old name and rule in his stead. I shall go down to Leighton Abbots on Monday or Tuesday, but I thought I would warn you first, that you might take measures accordingly."

"Take measures!" she repeated, rising to her feet with a wild, fierce look in her light grey eyes. "What measures can I take? If you carry out this scheme you destroy me, and you expect me to identify you! Ah, if old Maynard would but take counsel with me, I should soon settle the question of your identity."

"You see, Maynard is governed by different principles from yours." Mrs. Acland did not seem to hear him; she stood, her hands clasped and dropped before her, an expression of despair and fury distorting her face.

"Proving your story means destruction to me. Mr. Acland would repudiate me! My children will be taken from me, I shall be trampled in the dust of humiliation. Dick will revenge himself; I should fall below the hope of ever rising. I will never live to bear such a fate; you do not know me, Philip—I will die!"

"I do not want to be unnecessarily cruel," returned Brand, touched by her self-abandonment. "If you do not oppose me I will shield you as far as I can. I deserted you—you honestly believed me dead when you married Acland. I do not know much about law, but I am pretty sure you could get a divorce from me, and he would marry you; in six months all would be forgotten—of the past I would never speak: I want to shield Dick's mother."

"But you forget," she said in a fierce whisper, "that Mr Acland will know that I recognized you three years ago. Had I not feared your slanders, your tale of my infidelity, I should have faced the recognition then; Mr. Acland is the most sensitive of men, the scandal and exposure would kill him. Philip!" changing her tone; "you are suffering, your strength is broken; you have a sufficiency, Dick is on the high road to a respectable position such as he is fitted for. Why take up this cruel story of our misfortunes? Let yourself rest for the present, and I swear to you that when this Mr. Maynard dies I will assert Dick's claim, if you are not here to do it yourself." She stretched out her clasped hands to him in passionate entreaty.

"Understand me," said Brand sternly, "that it is waste of breath urging such a request. I will not be vindictive, but you are of no more value to me than the lightest thistledown, compared to the son we have both so deeply injured. I am determined to secure him the chance of being heir to Leighton Abbots before I die; and your happiness or unhappiness, your reputation, your life, will not weigh with me for one moment as compared to this. But your case is not so desperate. I shall never tell Dick that I am convinced you took that money from your husband's safe, to assist Blake, the villain, to escape."

"I deny it," she cried in much agitation.

Brand smiled. "Be that as it may, tell the villain not to cross me."

"He is far away, if he be still alive."

"He is in London," returned Brand severely. "I saw him yesterday, disguised, skulking along the Embankment."

Mrs. Acland gasped as if for breath and sank into a chair.

"Now you know my intentions," resumed Brand, with a slight

softening in his tone. "I must beg you to leave me ; I am suffering horribly and must get some relief ; as soon as I see Maynard and arrange with him I must meet you again and plan how best to break the matter to Mr. Acland. Let me know how I can see you in the course of the week ; address to me here."

"I will," she said, regaining composure by a wonderful effort of self-control. "I deserve little at your hands, but, Philip, do not be unnecessarily cruel."

"I will not—by Heaven, I will not. Ah !" A moan was wrung from him by a thrill of extreme pain. He seized the phial and looked round for a measure glass which generally stood beside it. "Where can that glass be ?" he cried.

"Let me drop it for you, Philip," she said softly ; "my hand is very steady."

He smiled in the midst of his anguish. "You are infinitely good ; I prefer measuring such stuff myself." He rang the bell as he spoke.

"Then I will leave you," she said in a sad voice, while a wave of colour passed over her face, "and I will write without fail. Do not attempt to address me till you hear." She went noiselessly away, a hell fire of impotent rage burning in her heart. A few steps from the door she met the chambermaid hurrying to answer Brand's bell.

"The poor gentleman cannot find his measure glass," she said blandly.

"Oh, dear ; I left it in my place at the end of the passage ; I'll fetch it in a minute."

"Pray, first, tell me which way to turn to the staircase ; I am afraid of losing my train."

"Straight on, first passage on the left," and she hastened in the opposite direction. Mrs. Acland paused ; she was at the door of the room next Brand's, she had noticed it as she came up ; the door was then open and the chambermaids were coming out with dust-pans and brooms ; it was probably unoccupied. Some half-unconscious cerebration prompted her to turn the handle, the door was locked, but the key was in it ; the next instant she had unlocked it, withdrawn the key, entered—and relocked it ; all this with infinite noiseless rapidity. Once safe within the chamber she sank upon the nearest chair and looked round.

The window had been forgotten and was open, admitting the cold air, the roar of the street, and some of the glare from the gas lamps below.

After a moment of strange numbness, which she resolutely resisted, the sound of voices in the next room roused her attention ; she listened, eagerly attentive.

"So sorry, sir, I forgot to bring back your glass," said the voice of the chambermaid.

"Never mind ; just pour in a teaspoonful out of the small

bottle, the other is chloroform—now some water; thank you. Lower the gas—I will try and get some sleep.”

“ Hope you’ll be better soon, sir.” The sound of the closing door was followed by complete stillness.

Collecting her thoughts, Mrs. Acland perceived that the distinctness with which she heard the above sentences was accounted for by a thin line of light which showed that the door between the rooms was slightly ajar. She sat rigidly quiet, while her thoughts began to clear themselves from the mists of furious disappointment, the agony of anticipated discovery and disgrace. Occasional deep sighs, almost moans, reached her ear—then came profound silence which might have shaken nerves of less strength than those of the resolute but defeated woman who sat there in the semi-darkness as if turned to stone.

Was she, after all, to go down before the lance of her despised husband, whose devotion to her in the first year or two of her married life had only excited a sense of contemptuous weariness? Not without a supreme effort. How she hated him, all the more for his insolent pretence of pity and consideration for her! If he were avowedly cruel, revengeful, implacable, she could respect him and understand him. To ask or give quarter was repugnant to her. Was she then to give up the struggle, to see herself dethroned, pushed from her place in her husband’s heart and estimation, put out of her house to make room for that wretched girl Marjory, whom she had never been quite able to vanquish and who would become naturally its mistress? And Dick, if wealthy and powerful, would he not trample her under his feet in return for evil she had done him? No; she would *not* live to face all this, was her passionate determination when these thoughts had circled with the rapidity of lightning through her brain. He had refused to let her administer the calmant he needed. Did he think her capable of murder? Why not justify his suspicions? If he took an over-dose of chloroform or chloral, how would it affect her?

Not a soul save Mr. Maynard knew that Brand and Philip Cranston were one and the same. He had been so long away, he was so changed, that if any of his old comrades were about, which was not likely, they would never recognize him—and Mr. Maynard would of course be silent; she was not sure that he knew his impecunious cousin had a son.

If Philip was safe in his grave, she could hold on the even tenor of her way till old Maynard was gathered to his fathers. In the meantime she could effect a reconciliation with Dick, and, when the present possessor of Leighton Abbots was no more, appear as the champion of her son’s rights, ay! and win them too. Her marriage lines, the registry of her boy’s baptism, all were in order; his claim would be indisputable, for Cranston never appeared to have told his suspicions to any one, and she would pose as the

mother of a great landed proprietor, the representative of an old squirearchical family, so evil would become her good. Could she hesitate to secure such advantages? was she weak enough to hold her hand when fortune gave such a chance? The door was safe. If any one attempted to enter, it would be supposed that the key had been taken by some of the attendants, a search would ensue during which she might escape. She felt all her steadiness of purpose, all her natural courage, come back to her; she rose, took off her cloak—it might hamper her movements—and put up her veil; then she softly, slowly, opened the door wider.

Though the gas had been lowered the fire burned brightly, and everything in the room was visible. Brand was profoundly asleep; he had evidently leaned over to place the glass on the table beside him, and had remained in that position, his shoulder supported by the curved back of his chair, his elbow on the arm; his hand had been under his head, but had partially slipped away, so that his face was bent over the table; his lips apart, he breathed deeply, quietly, as if relieved from pain.

Mrs. Acland crept noiselessly round to the door which led to the passage and locked that also; then she drew near, taking care not to interpose herself between the light and the sleeper.

Yes, he was much changed, she thought. As she calmly stood and watched him the flickering fire-light showed the furrows, the sunken eyes, the lines and curves which made the kindly handsome face pathetic. But it did not touch the woman who gazed upon him, who had lured him with tender wiles and lain in his arms; she listened to his breathing, and noted his position with deadly content; then she looked eagerly round to see if there were any letters or paper she could examine, and if necessary appropriate; but nothing of that description lay about, save one, at which she glanced. It was signed "Beaulieu" and described the death of his baby nephew, finally asking the address of that clever young fellow Cranston; this she threw away—she was losing time.

Again she glided to the table and took up the chloroform; the top was screwed down tight, it required a little force to open, then the odour made itself perceptible; she turned her head at once lest it might affect herself, and put on the top loosely; removing the smaller bottle she replaced it by the chloroform. The bottle which contained it was broad and short; its position did not satisfy her; she looked round and noticed a large bible, such as the Christian Knowledge Society distribute, lying on a chest of drawers; she swiftly seized it, placed it beneath the bent head of the sleeper, and on it put the chloroform, so that with each breath he should inhale the potent vapour; she withdrew the stopper and laid it on the carpet just at Brand's foot, as though it had fallen from his hand as he became overpowered. Then she paused, glanced round once more, and retreated to the

door by which she had entered; there she turned, cast a final look at the inanimate figure and whispered, "I am not beaten yet."

Passing into the next room she felt for the key, there was none, but there was a bolt which she shot, then she put on her cloak, pulled down her thick veil, and still strung to the highest pitch of nervous tension, listened at the door which led into the passage. There was the sound of voices speaking together, of several persons walking to and fro; a fat, loud, authoritative voice was ordering the luggage to be taken up to No. 132.

With infinite caution she opened the door about an inch. A group of persons—an old gentleman and two young ladies attended by a waiter, and followed by Boots with wraps and umbrellas—were just passing towards the staircase at the further end of the passage; directly their backs were towards her she slipped out, turned and withdrew the key, and walked steadily in the opposite direction downstairs and into the hall. Here she stopped and looking at the clock said unconsciously aloud: "Just a minute or two sooner and I should have caught my train, now I have an hour and a half to wait."

She passed out into the crowded station, dexterously dropping the key on a mat that no sound might attract attention.

But she began to feel faint and dizzy; amazed at her own success, yet strangely breathless; she hesitated, turned into the refreshment room and ordered some tea. While doing so she was suddenly accosted by Mr. Middleton, the clergyman of the church which Mr. Acland's family attended. She was ashamed of the wild terror which paralyzed her for an instant. The next she rallied, and smiling sweetly said, "Ah! Mr. Middleton; this is indeed fortunate. I came up this afternoon to see Mr. Acland off for Hampshire, and loitered too long at home, so have just lost my train."

"Much my own case," returned the reverend gentleman. "Going to have some tea? I shall join you if you will allow me, I am going nearly all the way to Folkestone—Mrs. Middleton and the children are at Sandgate—and I shall be very happy to be your escort."

"Much obliged to you. I did not at all calculate on being so late, and am very fortunate to have met you."

"And you are at Folkestone this season? Don't you find it somewhat bleak and exposed?" and so on and so on, about east wind and climate, fine sands and good bathing, which topics Mrs. Acland calmly discussed—firmly believing that her victim upstairs would never cross her path again.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CLOUDS DISPERSE.

It was a new and painful sensation for Marjory to be glad that Dick was away. Nevertheless it was a relief not to be on guard all Saturday and Sunday.

Only seven short days ago she had had that delightful walk with him, and listened to the disastrous confession which had opened her eyes to her own folly and weakness. To feel as she did towards a man who looked upon her as a sister only was unmaidenly and unnatural. Had they been unconnected, and he had shown her attentions which were misleading, there might be some excuse for her. As it was she blushed for herself.

She had a brave spirit, however, and a reasonable soul. So that Sabbath morning she rose with a settled purpose of uprooting the culpable feeling of which she was guilty, and replacing it by simple sisterly regard. "I do not believe it is impossible to master one's emotions and tendencies," thought Marjory, "if one is honest and convinced it is the right thing to do. I will only think of Dick as my friend and brother—or, better still, not think of him at all," and forthwith she tried to turn her thoughts on Ellis and the curious episode with which he was connected, the result being that she now saw the hidden influence which steeled her against the accomplished diplomat. In her heart she always weighed him against Dick, and found him always wanting. The effect of her cogitations was that she met George at breakfast with an air of alert cheerfulness which delighted that young gentleman.

"You *are* a jolly girl, Marge!" he exclaimed, as she tied a large print apron over her dress and proceeded to wash up the breakfast things. "You keep a fellow alive. I should have been a confirmed invalid if I had been left alone here. Old Mother Stokes is not half bad; but she is generally doleful."

"Thank you, George. It is something to know one is appreciated. Come, let us be ready in good time; Mrs. Rennie is to send the pony carriage for us that we may go to church with them. They will not be at home for four or five Sundays after this."

All day she kept up the same brave front.

"Why, Marjory!" exclaimed Mary Rennie, "One would think you were glad we are going away."

"Hoot-toot," said her father. They were all gathered on the shady side of the tennis ground after their early Sunday dinner. "Hoot-toot, there's nothing to fret her in a month's absence. It does a man's heart good to have such a bonny blythe lassie beside

him," and he smiled kindly on his young *protégée*. Mr. Rennie when pleased and at ease was more intensely Scotch than at any other time. "But, for all that, you haven't such roses in your cheeks as you had a while ago."

"They have faded in the summer heats," returned Marjory. "But what are you going to do while Mrs. Rennie and Mary are away?"

"Do? Eh! I have plenty to do. I have to go to London and Manchester and Hull. I am thinking of having another place of business in the North. Perhaps in two or three years Forbes might be fit to manage it, and take George to help him. Your brother is doing very well, Miss Margery. He was not too quick at first, but he understands what he is about now, and, what is best, he puts his heart into his work. If he goes on as he has begun he will be a useful lad in a while, and shall have an increase of salary, but it was a good thought of yours to come and stay with him. You have just kept his heart up."

"It is pleasant to hear you say so, Mr. Rennie."

"Why don't you take a holiday yourself? Go and see your father and mother for a bit, eh?"

"And leave George? Oh, no, I would much rather stay here."

"Eh? and why, my lassie?"

"Now, papa, don't you go cross-examining Margery; it ain't civil. Of course she would not leave her brother this first summer. It is nice and airy up in your rooms, I will tell the gardener to send you fruit and flowers twice a week, and when papa is away you'll let Forbes have tea with you; it is lonesome for him at home," said Mrs. Rennie.

"Oh, of course. We are always delighted to see him. You will come in to us whenever you like while Mr. Rennie is away." This to Forbes, who strolled up from the stables with George as she spoke.

"Ay, that I will; it is always so bright and jolly up in your rooms. And, Marjory, how is the writing going on?" (young people soon grow unceremonious and it had been "Marjory" and "Forbes" for some time).

"It is not *going* at all; it is constantly coming back," returned Marjory laughing and blushing. "What do you know of my lucubrations? I suspect George has been a traitor."

"I did let out the cat; I forgot about it being a secret."

"May I be in the secret too?" said Mrs. Rennie.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Rennie, if you care to know," replied Marjory, laying her hand caressingly on hers. "You see, I have a good deal of spare time, and I have wanted for a long time to make some money, so, as I used to amuse the little ones at school with my stories, I thought I could try to write one, and send it to *Little Folks*, but it was rejected. Nor would *Our Darlings* have it

either. I am still trying, however, and hope to get it in somewhere."

"What! Have you written a whole tale by yourself?" cried Mrs. Rennie, surprised and delighted. "What a clever girl you are, Marjory!"

"That depends on the sort of tale I have written."

"I am pretty sure it is not nonsense," observed Mr. Rennie lighting a fresh cigar, "and I hope you will have luck, missee."

Then Marjory was carried off to be catechised by Mary.

"I hope we shall hear something of Mr. Brand from Dick to-morrow," said Marjory to her brother, as they walked home together in the fresh, crisp autumnal evening, by the light of the rising moon.

"Oh! He will be sure to turn up; there is nothing to make you uneasy."

"No, of course not; but Dick *was* uneasy about Mr. Brand for some reason or other, and I seem to feel a sort of reflected discomfort. I am really very fond of Mr. Brand."

"Reflected discomfort," repeated George. "Why, Marge, we will have you writing volumes of poetry presently if you indulge in such tall talk to me."

"I am sure there is nothing very poetical in my phraseology," said Marjory laughing; but she continued to think of the anxious look Dick's face had worn when he spoke of the depressed tone that pervaded Brand's letters.

Monday passed swiftly, every hour being fully employed till evening, when brother and sister waited in vain for Dick, and much of their talk was of him and conjectures as to the cause of his non-appearance.

George declared his intention of going to his lodgings as soon as he could get away from business next day, and Marjory, while approving her brother's resolution, pictured the missing Dick writing far into the night, pouring out all his troubles, his hopes, to that black-eyed girl in France, for in France she instinctively thought he must have met her. Could it have been the countess of whom he spoke incidentally? He had said one day she was a widow. No; Marjory pictured her as quite too old. "There is no use in thinking about it," she said rebukingly to herself; "in due time I shall know everything."

The next day was damp, with occasional drizzling rain, and Marjory, mindful of the rheumatic pains George felt now and then, made a bright little fire about an hour before the usual time of his return. She had disposed some chrysanthemums about the rooms and fastened a couple at her throat. She was full of the idea she kept repeating to herself that her mission in life was to help and comfort George, at any rate till he was older and stronger.

She had lit her lamp, and was standing by the fire reading the

volume of Tennyson which had been given her by Ellis, and which she had opened at random, when a tap at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of Dick, startled her.

"Oh! Dick!" throwing down her book. "I am so glad to see you; we were beginning to be quite anxious about you and Mr. Brand. Why did you not come up last night?"

"I could not manage it," he said, taking her hand, she fancied more coldly than formerly. "I was tired and had one or two things to do for Brand, who is very unwell. He gave me a scare on Saturday."

"How?"

"You know I went up by the two-thirty train, and got to his hotel about eight. The porter said he was in his room, so up I went. When I came to the door it was locked, and I could *not* make Brand hear; as I stood knocking and feeling rather uneasy one of the chambermaids came by; she stopped and said 'I think the gentleman must be asleep, sir; he took some sleeping stuff about a quarter of an hour ago, for he made me measure it out for him, but I can let you in through the next room.' I followed her to the door, but *that* was locked too; the girl declared she had left the key in it, and called another chambermaid, who remembered having left it also, then they brought a head-woman with a lot of keys, and found one that fitted. I rushed in by a door that led into Brand's room, and found him quite insensible. He had evidently locked himself in, and, no doubt driven by suffering, had opened his bottle of chloroform, dropping the stopper at his feet, where we found it. I thought it was all over with him; his heart still beat, however. Fortunately there was a medical man staying in the hotel, and we soon had him up. The doctor had all the doors and windows opened and fanned him, and forced a little brandy into his mouth; he was going to try electricity when Brand half opened his eyes, so at last we brought him round. He was very bad for a bit and I sat up all night with him. I can tell you I was thankful when daylight came and I found him quite clear and sensible. I never was in such a fright before; the doctor said that a few moments more and he would have been gone; we were only just in time."

"I don't wonder at your being frightened," cried Marjory. "He must have been very near death."

"He was. Do you know, Marge? I never knew how fond I had grown of him until I looked at him lying still and lifeless; till the doctor came I thought he was gone. You see, he is the best friend I have, I ever had, the only one—except you Marge."

He held out his hand with a sudden impulse of tenderness, she put hers in it, looking up to him with kindly, loving eyes, "And George, Dick."

"Yes, of course, but he can never be to me what you are;

though he is a good fellow. I can tell *you* every—at least I used to tell you everything.”

“And why not now?” she cried, charmed to feel quite sisterly for the moment. “You know you *might* tell me everything. I do not think your black-eyed sweetheart in France would mind,” smiling.

“In France?” echoed Dick surprised. “I have no sweetheart in France.”

“I fancied she was in France.”

“No, no. I don’t want to talk about her.”

Marjory kept silence, surprised at his impatient tone.

“When I saw Brand open his eyes I *was* glad,” continued Dick, releasing her hand. “But it was some time before he spoke distinctly. I never left him all night, nor next day. It is curious he cannot remember locking his door, nor did he intend to open the chloroform. In fact he is quite confused about everything, but thank God he is living and on the road to recovery. We got a nurse to watch him, and I did not leave till eight on Sunday night, so by the time I wrote a letter or two after work yesterday I was ready for bed.”

“I should think you were, indeed. Now sit down and have some tea, George will be here soon. He intended going to see what had become of you.”

Dick sat down, and resting his elbows on the table leant his head upon his hands, while Marjory put the kettle—which had been humming gently beside the fire—on it. “Mr. Brand is all right now. Is he not? You must cheer up, dear Dick,” she said presently, sitting down by him and laying her hand on his shoulder, for she was moved by the dejection of his attitude.

“Oh, yes, thank God, he will do, I believe, but somehow I cannot help worrying my heart out about—about what cannot be helped; you are very good to me, Marge.” He put his arm round her and pressed her to him, so close that she felt his heart beat. “You never thought at one time that you would be such friends with the monster, eh, Marge? You ought to be good to me, you know you have given me many a stab.”

“Don’t!” whispered Marjory, who felt terribly inclined to cry, and longing to break away from him, yet not liking to resist his brotherly embrace. “It is you who are good and kind to forgive me, and be friends with me. I wish you would tell me what troubles you. I would do a great deal for you, Dick.”

“Not what I want though,” he said as if to himself as he released her.

“But I would; I would do anything in the world for you or George.”

“Well, I am not going to ask you,” he returned with rather a grim smile. “By-the-way, there is something troubling Brand, I fancy. He is in such a furious hurry to get well and about

again I can't help thinking that he is planning something for me. He asks me a lot of questions, especially as to what I remembered of both my father and mother. I think he wandered a little. I know he has put curious thoughts into my head."

"What thoughts, Dick?"

"I do not think it would be honourable——" Dick was beginning when George made his appearance, and the whole story had to be told over again.

The three friends had an animated discussion of the circumstances, and agreed that really Brand should never be left alone since he was subject to such attacks; he evidently did not know what he was doing when he leaned over to inhale that dreadful chloroform &c., &c. The rest of the evening was spent in friendly, kindly talk of plans and hopes and memories. George had had a letter from his father with a kind message from Mrs. Acland, who had gone to the sea-side with the children, but the usual "love to Marjory" was the only mention of that young person.

Altogether it was more like old times, and Dick was more like his old self. He announced his intention of going up to look after Brand on Saturday, but until then he would come every evening "and thankful to have such a place to come to; you always made things nice and pretty, Marge; good-night."

* * * * *

Leighton Abbot was never a very cheerful residence, though rich in natural beauty; away in the woods and dells, by the clear brown stream chafing against its resisting rocks, in the open breezy pastures, the face of nature laughed cheerfully to the sun, but round the stately house with its formal gardens hung an atmosphere of silence and depression. The spirit of the inhabitant influences his material dwelling place, and the iron had entered deeply into the soul of the present possessor.

This fine old place was not the original home of the Cranstons. It had come into the hands of Edward Cranston by the bequest of his illegitimate brother, John Maynard, a man of great ability and force of character, who devoted his whole existence to amassing a large fortune, of which he had little enjoyment.

At the outset of his career he had received some friendly assistance from Edward, who was but a few years younger than himself, and fairly well off. This circumstance impressed itself deeply on his tenacious mind, though he held little or no intercourse with his brother.

His will, after a few legacies, constituted Edward Cranston residuary legatee, provided he took the name of the testator's beloved mother, thus as it were making him her debtor. The will further provided that should Edward leave no son the property was to go to the eldest Cranston living at the death

of Edward, be the degree of relationship what it might so long as the Cranston inheriting was a direct descendant of John Cranston, the testator's father.

It was no small trial to the legatee to have the name of his father's mistress thus imposed upon him. The pill however was well gilt, and Edward Cranston took possession of his fortune, and though a proud, cold man administered it well. He had married late in life, and at the death of John Maynard had an only child, a boy in extremely delicate health, whose birth had cost his mother's life; this son he idolized, and when, after infinite care, after all the aid that modern skill and science could bestow, he strengthened into fairly vigorous manhood, and married a charming, high-born woman, Cranston felt that fortune had no further favour to grant.

Cruel as had been the blow dealt him in the loss of this son, the death of his grandchild was even a more bitter stroke. With the infant went all hopes of seeing a direct descendant to carry on his name and occupy his place. He had grown attached to the splendid home with which he had identified himself. Pride was the strongest passion of his nature, and lay at the root of his dislike to his nephew Philip, whose degrading choice of an artistic, in preference to a professional, life was to his mind unpardonable. Then his obscure marriage, his poverty, his bohemianism, all made up a cairn of offence which was not to be surmounted. Yet Cranston Maynard was not ungenerous; that is he was always ready to pay for what he wanted, and in giving an annuity to his offending nephew he considered that he had bought him off cheaply, and removed an ugly spot from the family scutcheon. In all human probability there would be no chance of his ever succeeding to the property, but if there were, it was better he should be out of the way.

Now all his hopes, his plans, his pride lay buried in the grave of his little grandson, and the old man's heart would have been dead to all human feeling but for the intense anger he felt against his poor young daughter-in-law. He was too proud and haughty a man to admit the rector's orthodox consolations. He absolutely refused to see him, and day after day sat silent, brooding, morose, in the study which adjoined his bedroom. His valet, who had been with him some years, and was somewhat attached to the generous, masterful old man, grew alarmed at his mute, stern grief, his sleeplessness and total loss of appetite. In vain the cook sent up her most cunningly contrived dishes to tempt him—in vain the butler ransacked the cellar for the choicest wines, the lord of the mansion turned with loathing from all alike.

The hesitating but earnest entreaty of the housekeeper that he would see the local doctor was met by a grim refusal. It was then a relief to the household generally when Captain Hugh Cranston, the master's nephew, arrived. He was Mr. Maynard's heir

presumptive, and on friendly though not intimate terms with his uncle. He was a highly scientific naval officer, had been employed on various "search" expeditions, had dredged up monsters from the briny deep, had written a treatise on an uncomfortable rudimentary creature, consisting of digestive organs and eyes, which had excited much interest among naturalists, and contributed endless papers to the "Transactions" of various learned societies; occupations Mr. Cranston Maynard was given to "pooh pooh," but which he did not consider derogatory to a gentleman.

It was nearly twenty-four hours before the bereaved old man could be persuaded to see his future successor, although he had come on his own invitation, and when he consented to receive him he scarcely spoke at first.

Captain Cranston was tall, like most of his race, but round-shouldered, with a broad brow, thick grizzled whiskers, and mild, thoughtful blue eyes.

The meeting was extremely awkward. Maynard glared at his nephew as if he begrudged him his length of days; and Captain Cranston, as is not unusual with some of the kindest Englishmen, was at a loss how to express his heart-felt sympathy with his desolate kinsman.

"I scarcely know why I sent for you," said Mr. Maynard at last. "Those busybodies, Lambert and Green, suggested it. I suppose *you* were ready enough to come and look at the property you consider already your own?"

"You wrong me, uncle. I never gave your fortune a thought. I came because I believed you had some need of me, and because I most deeply and sincerely regret the terrible loss you have suffered."

"I forbid you to speak of it, sir. I do not want your pity. Perhaps it is as well you should know something of the estate you will inherit."

"It is not so sure I shall inherit it; life is very uncertain, returning to town I may be smashed up; you are just as likely to outlive me as I am to outlive you. Indeed, I am not the sort of man to be owner of a large estate. I am an old bachelor, I have enough for all I want, property would only bring me trouble. I wish that poor fellow Philip had not been drowned; he would probably have been a better, and certainly a more picturesque——"

"I do not wish to hear his name mentioned," again interrupted Maynard in a tone of disgust. "It is the one drop of bitterness I have been spared to know that worthless bohemian is—is out of the way."

"I suppose you had some reason for disliking him; I must say I found him companionable and pleasant enough. He was perhaps weak and too easy going; I lost sight of him after his marriage, however."

"He was a worthless vagabond," exclaimed Mr. Maynard with

some vehemence. "Reckless—reckless to a degree, and when he could not face his creditors he ran away, deserted his wife and child; I was obliged to give her a hundred pounds to start with in some business, or to go abroad. She promised she would never trouble me again, and, by George, she never did!"

"Then you do not know what became of the child. Was it a boy?"

"Yes."

"Something ought to be done for him. I suppose he is younger than Bernard Cranston's boys."

"I know nothing about him."

Having exhausted this topic, which Mr. Maynard was evidently not at all disposed to pursue, Captain Cranston unfortunately asked how and where poor young Mrs. Maynard was; this called forth a flood of bitterness. "Thanks to her preposterous, ridiculous fancies I am robbed of my last hope," exclaimed the old man. "The air of Leighton Abbot was too trying for her; a change to the sea would do the boy good; as if we did not thrive well enough here. So she dragged the child away to that cockneyfied seaside hole, Eastbourne, because her sister was staying there; got into an ill-drained house, and was the death of my grandson. She is in London, I believe, but I neither know nor care; she writes me long and no doubt canting letters—but I don't read them; I won't read them."

"You are too hard on her, sir, and she has been hit hard enough already I imagine by the loss of her baby."

"*Her* baby! What's her loss to mine! The boy was not the sole representative of *her* family; she is young, she will marry again before the year is out. She has a brother and sisters, and I—I have nothing. Do not name her to me again——"

Hugh Cranston was infinitely shocked at this outbreak. "Certainly not, if such is your wish," he said, and, as science does not develop tact, he added, "but I must say that I don't see why you should blame the poor young mother."

"Don't you?" grimly. "Then we are not likely to agree. Now I am tired. You had better go and walk round your property. I am no companion for any one. I wish I could go to sleep and never wake."

"Shall I not see you at dinner, uncle?" said Hugh Cranston, to whom the valet had confided his fears that his master was starving himself to death.

"No; I have done with life and its ways. Leave the old dog to die in his own kennel; I don't want to be troubled with any one or anything. But as in *you* I shall have at least an honourable gentleman for a successor, I authorize you to come and go as you choose; make yourself acquainted with the property and the tenants, all will soon be yours. If I do not care to speak much

with you do not consider that any mark of ill-will. Now go. I shall try to sleep."

Captain Cranston retreated, not unwillingly,

As the day was dry and clear he spent the afternoon in roaming about the park, inspecting the fauna and flora with much more interest than he did the marketable productions of the soil.

And thus three days passed; on each of them Captain Cranston paid a visit to his uncle, who endured his presence for a few moments and then peremptorily dismissed him. The rest of his time passed peaceably in preparing notes on some rare fungi peculiar to the district, and in long rambles by flood and field. The servants treated him as their future master; the head groom inquired each morning if there were "any orders," and was quite disgusted to find that the future lord of Leighton Abbot preferred his own pair of feet to four of any other animal.

Still he began to wish for his bachelor quarters in Half Moon Street, his rubber at the Athenæum, and his preparations for the coming sessions of the Entomological Society.

Mr. Maynard, however, would not listen to his suggestion that he should return to town.

"Can't you amuse yourself here? Are there no horses in the stables, no birds in the covers, no hounds? You can surely find something to do." Captain Cranston explained that he really was so unorthodox as not to care for killing anything, unless indeed he wanted a specimen, thereby lowering himself a good deal in his uncle's estimation.

The weather had changed the next afternoon, and being caught in an open field by a severe shower of rain and hail Captain Cranston returned to the house earlier than usual, having been drenched to the skin.

"There is a strange gentleman with Mr. Maynard, sir," said the butler, who appeared to have been on the watch for him.

"Indeed! Did he not give his name?"

"No, sir. He sent in a note, and Mr. Maynard saw him directly. Nicholls says they have been talking loud, and would you mind going in, sir."

"I hardly like to intrude."

"You might go in promiscuous-like; Nicholls is afraid Mr. Maynard will be upset, sir."

"Very well; I will change my coat and boots first."

In a few minutes Hugh Cranston quietly opened the door of his uncle's sitting-room, and saw the old man grasping the arms of his chair, a look of fierce anger on his pale, gaunt face, while the fire-light gleamed upon the form of his visitor, a man little over middle height, well though rather unconventionally dressed, thin and worn looking, but still handsome, who stood at the

opposite side of the fire-place, his eyes fixed resolutely, but not unkindly, at the agitated countenance before him.

Hugh Cranston paused for a moment in growing surprise, his honest blue eyes brightening, then, making a step forward with outstretched hand, exclaimed, "Philip Cranston! why—how—where have you come from?"

"Hugh!" cried the stranger, grasping the offered hand, and the two men stood still gazing at each other.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

RECOGNITION.

CRANSTON MAYNARD fell back in his chair with a deep sigh, as if he had received a sudden blow.

"I am afraid your unexpected appearance has been a little too much for my uncle," said Captain Cranston.

"I fear it has," returned the other, as both turned to look at the old man; "I should not have intruded upon him," he continued, "had not duty to my son compelled me."

"False; false as ever," said Maynard hoarsely; "you promised when I offered to give you the annuity I have since paid, that you would disappear, and now you come to—to—rob a better man than yourself."

"Your deep sorrow commands my endurance of almost any insult. Will you not hear my explanation?"

"Then you knew he had not been drowned," cried Captain Cranston, much amazed.

"I did; but he had voluntarily renounced his rights. I did well to cut off such a withered branch from the family tree."

"Ask him to hear me," said Philip (who has been hitherto known as Brand) appealingly to Captain Cranston; "I do not deserve the prejudice he has against me."

"Come, sir, at least hear what he has to say."

Mr. Maynard bent his head in token of willingness to listen. Philip Cranston, turning so as to face his uncle, and with a slight unsteadiness of voice began:

"When I met you in London I was at the lowest ebb, and cared little what became of me. I was broken by ill-health, and would have done almost anything to get some physical comfort, food to eat, a comfortable shelter, clothes to wear; I assure you it is extremely hard to keep up to the mark in the teeth of fierce bodily need. When you offered me enough to keep body and soul together on condition of burying Philip Cranston for ever I thought I had the best of the bargain. I did not expect to be long a recipient of your bounty, I did not then know I had a son; even if I did, there seemed but small chance of either of us inherit-

ing after you. I therefore did not believe I wronged any one in accepting relief from you. Soon after I found my boy was living under the roof of the man his mother had married, believing me to be dead. There he was well treated, safe, respectable, and given a career, as he had been taken into his supposed step-father's office. What had I to offer him in exchange? Why should I bring more trouble on his mother whom I had already injured? The truest kindness to both was to remain in the grave of oblivion to which I had already been consigned."

Here Captain Cranston murmured something about legal obligation, but his uncle said hoarsely, "Go on."

"I therefore avoided my boy," resumed Philip, "and left England, wandering about in a purposeless way. But rest, food, certainty recruited me. I began to live once more. The old love of my art came back to me. I began to sketch; I began to like work once more. Then while in the south of France I fell in with Lord Beaulieu, whom I had known slightly in America. He liked some views I had taken on his property there, consulted me about the decorations of an old château he was about to repair, and finally asked me to undertake those at his place in England. I went, and there I found my boy, who had, for reasons I will not trouble you with now, left his mother and turned mason, hoping to become an architect. I have never quite parted with him since. I feel with you, sir," he continued huskily, "because my love for that boy teaches me *what* a bereavement you have sustained."

The old man raised himself with a look of indignation. "Nay; hear me out," cried Philip; "more than that, I can honestly say that if the grave could give you back your dead I would rejoice. It is not so much the wealth and position I grasp at for my son—I believe firmly it is in him to make both—but I will not rob him of his possible rights. I could not rest in the hereafter, and think that he might reproach me for having kept back knowledge which might be all-important to him. I wish, sir, I could persuade you to see him—not to acknowledge him as an heir—that he is not. I may be carried off at any moment; mine is not a good life, then Hugh would succeed you; but my boy is a Cranston every inch—he is the soul of truth and honour; to know that I have such a son has made a different man of me. He is in the first flush of manhood, with the keenest sense of enjoyment, but he is master of himself as his father never was, as strong men only are. I wish you would see and acknowledge him."

"See him! see the young plebeian who has thriven when my son, a through-bred, was cut off in the opening of a fair life full of promise. Never, never! and from this hour I withdraw the allowance I have hitherto made you; you have broken the conditions on which it was granted," almost screamed the old man.

"I have," said Philip, bending his head. "So I cannot complain. At least, you both acknowledge my identity. I shall now reassume my name. As I said before, it is highly probable I may go before you, then Hugh will be head of the house, and a very good one he will make, but I'll not sacrifice my boy's chance; nor will you," turning to Captain Cranston, "refuse to treat him as a kinsman?"

"Certainly not," replied Hugh promptly.

"I suppose you have nothing more to communicate," said Maynard harshly.

"Nothing," said Philip. "I shall therefore leave you, for——"

"Never to return," interrupted his uncle. "For you shall never be admitted inside my doors again; and, hark ye, I'll live, I'll outlive—you! The hope of keeping so unworthy a representative from ruling in my place will give me force to outlive you. Go! Let me never see your face again."

"I have never deserved your dislike," said Philip quietly, "and your denunciations do not affect me. I still hope that time may heal your wounds; believe me, I will never intrude again."

He bowed slightly and left the room.

"I can't let him go without a word," said Captain Cranston. "I will send your man; you ought to have something after such a shake."

So saying he hurried after his cousin, whom he found at the entrance and looking about him with some interest.

"You must not mind him, poor old fellow; he is awfully broken," said Captain Cranston, joining him. "Come and have a glass of wine with me; you look no great things yourself. I want to hear how you come to be alive, and lots of things. How have you managed to get so deep into my uncle's black books? As far as I can make out you have been reckless and imprudent, but nothing more."

"I do not understand it myself; his anger does not move me much. I *am* sorry for him, but I will not eat or drink in his house. If you will walk back with me to the gates I will tell you my tale *in extenso*. I shall get a conveyance at the 'Plough' and catch the night train at Helmstone. This is a fine place; I never had a chance of seeing it before. Come along, Hugh, I want to win your friendship for my son; it would be of great value to him."

The two men walked away down the avenue, which they soon left for the greensward, strolling under the grand old trees which were rapidly losing their leaves, towards the village which clustered near the park gates.

When Mr. Maynard's man came to his master he found him standing erect, looking through the window. "Bring me some champagne," he said, turning sharply on his valet, "and something to eat, game, cold meat, anything. Send one of the

men at once for Doctor Brown; if he can come to-night I shall be glad, if not, early to-morrow, and let Parkinson know I will dine with Captain Cranston this evening. I'll defeat that blackguard bohemian and his schemes yet," he muttered to himself, as Nicholls hurried away amazed to execute his orders. He paced slowly to and fro. "Ah! my limbs are stiff and weak, but I have an object to live for now, and I'll live—I'll live!"

* * * * *

Mrs. Acland's pallor and unusual restlessness attracted the notice and consternation of that important functionary, nurse, who communicated her impression to the parlour-maid (who had also accompanied the family out of town) that "Missus was not like herself, and was in her (nurse's) opinion, sickening for a fever which would make a pretty 'how-do-do' in seaside lodgings." Mrs. Acland was rather liked by her servants: she ruled with a firm and equable hand, she did not worry about trifles, neither was she penurious.

After church on the day which succeeded her visit to town she complained of a headache, and asked nurse to go with the children for their afternoon walk, not feeling equal to accompany them, as was her usual habit of a Sunday.

Then she established herself on a hard horse-hair covered sofa with a book which she could not read. She was acting over and over again every hour of the day before. She was calculating her chances—of detection she had little fear—not a soul could ever know she had re-entered Philip's room. Then, as to his identity, that was not so sure. Did he pass as Brand, or as Cranston at the hotel? Brand was the name by which she had asked for and found him, and Lord Beaulieu's letter was addressed to "Mr. Brand, Water Street, Dockborough."

There was nothing in all that to give any clue to the murderer. It was not a pleasant term, but she unhesitatingly applied it. She had had a narrow escape. Had she escaped? or had *he*, by any chance, escaped?

How she longed next day for the morning papers! There would certainly be a paragraph in some of them about "Death from the use of Chloroform at the Charing Cross Hotel."

The day dragged through, and at night, being worn out by the incessant action of her brain, she slept deeply. But Monday's papers contained no information, nor the next day's, though she searched the columns eagerly and sent for every newspaper to be had at Folkestone. So the week slipped by, and on Saturday Mr. Acland arrived to enjoy his week's holiday with his charming wife.

That week was the most trying she had ever known. She could gain no tidings of Brand (as he must still be called). She dared not make the smallest inquiry. Insignificant—unknown,

as he was—there would surely be some notice of such a death in so public an hotel. Another possible danger which occasionally flashed across the immediate peril of Brand's survival was the idea suggested by him that Blake was in London, if he had not been mistaken. She well knew that meant further extortion—greater complications. But would he dare to return to London? No; not when a warrant was out against him, and with such a record as his.

Haunted by such thoughts, even her power of self-mastery could not enable her to present her usual aspect of serene cheerfulness to her husband. He was much troubled by the change in her appearance, by her dejection and variable moods, and requested her to consult the famous Sir James Pettigrew. To this, with apparent reluctance, she assented, and promised to go up to town one day in the ensuing week; this was an opportunity not to be lost. Once in town she could ascertain something.

As to the visit to Sir James Pettigrew, she could easily manage *that*, and furnish herself with a valuable prescription, carefully copied from an old one, re-dated and signed with the great doctor's initials. It was a mere precaution, for Mr. Acland rarely questioned his wife's proceedings. She could thus secure a day and night in town, for, of course, she must go to town the day before her visit to the famous physician, in order to be in time for his early consulting hour. After much reflection she determined to call at the bureau of the hotel and inquire boldly if Mr. Brand were still in town. It required immense resolution, but she would not permit herself to falter; she was safe, she repeated to herself—absolutely safe. Yet it was no ordinary proof of her nerve power to walk calmly into the hall and put the question to the busy clerk:

“Is Mr. Brand still here?”

“Mr. Brand? No; he is gone out of town for a few days.”

“Has he left any address?”

“Yes; here it is.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Acland, rapidly copying it on the envelope of a letter, and walking away with trembling limbs.

Her desperate *coup* had failed and her position was as alarming as ever. Had the tide turned and had her luck left her? She thought hard as she threaded her way down the crowded Strand, intending to take a cup of tea at the first pastry-cook's she came to, and write a few lines to Brand, appointing a meeting. As she went slowly along her eye was struck by the figure of a man who passed her and walked on a few paces in front. There was something familiar to her in the broad shoulders, the short neck, the carriage of the head; she quivered with terror and repugnance. The man was dressed in a frock coat, much be-frogged, and a curl or two of reddish hair appeared from under a large soft felt hat pulled over his eyes. The clothes seemed foreign, but the gait was English; presently he stopped to look into a shop window;

Mrs. Acland saw his face. What with the shadow of his hat, a quantity of dark red beard and moustache, and a pair of blue spectacles, there was very little to be seen of the features, yet Mrs. Acland did not doubt that it was her former lover, her cruellest foe—Blake. She passed him steadily, quickly resolving not to make any sign of recognition. Without turning she knew, she felt, he was following her. In profound agitation she rapidly debated in her mind, whether she should hold to her intention of taking a cup of tea, or dodge the enemy by taking refuge in an omnibus. Blake, she thought with some satisfaction, had now no evidence against her, and with her husband her word would far outweigh that of the felon she still feared. No; she would not fly from him. Her position was still worth fighting for; she would with a steady hand pluck safety from the nettle danger. Her whole future, her chance of keeping her children with her (and her all of human feeling existed for them only) depended on her management of this selfish scoundrel. She would face the foe was her decision, as with courage, which in a better cause would have been splendid, she strove to steady her pulses, and turned into the first cake-shop she came to; walked through it to the dingy portion at the back, where little tables were laid out, and asked for some tea and bread and butter. As she had anticipated, before the refreshment she had asked for was brought, the figure she expected appeared. The man with the blue spectacles paused, then approached, bowed low, and said, almost in a whisper, "May I sit at your table?" Mrs. Acland bent her head in assent.

He drew a chair forward. When the waitress brought Mrs. Acland's cup, she asked, "What can I bring you, sir?" He said in a rough feigned voice, pointing to the cup and plate, "Tea—bread."

Then, leaning towards his companion, he whispered, "I must have an opportunity of speaking with you. I have risked much to see you, not daring to write."

"I do not want to hold any communication with you," she returned, setting her face to an agreeable conventional smile, so that any chance observer might fancy it was a friendly conversation. "You pledged yourself not to trouble me after you had driven me to a desperate expedient to supply you with money."

"Bad luck has left me no choice; besides I have some good news for you, Judith; good news of a matter in which you will need my help."

"You can never bring me any good. I suppose, then, you want money?"

"I do; but a mere trifle this time. We cannot talk here. You had better hear what I have to say. Can't you hear me now? I have come partly on your business at a risk to myself."

"Where can we be safe?" she asked. "If you will tell me how I can be rid of you I will listen."

"I'll show the way," he said eagerly; "I don't want to force myself on you, but I'll have my share of the plunder. As soon as you have swallowed your tea I will go out and get a cab; turn left when you come out of here and you'll see me; we'll drive up and down the Embankment, where it is quiet, and I can leave you at one of the Metropolitan stations when we have had our talk."

Mrs. Acland shuddered, but bent her head in silent assent.

"It was a bit of luck stumbling on you to-day. Do you know what brought me this way? I saw in one of the evening papers that a man called Brand had nearly killed himself with chloroform in the Charing Cross Hotel; and I wanted to find him, for he might be useful if he is Cranston's old chum. He has gone, but I have got his address."

"Do not talk to me any more till we are alone," said Mrs. Acland faintly. He nodded and soon after rose, made her a low formal bow, paid for his tea, and went out. She summoned the attendant and paid for hers while she thought: "He does not dream who Brand is; while Philip knows him. Thank Heaven, I never told that villain of his visit to me, his recognition of Dick." She left the shop, and stepping into the cab with Blake, the driver, who had received his instructions, at once drove off to the Embankment, where in the comparative quiet Blake began:

"First, for my bit of good news. Old Cranston Maynard's grandson died about three weeks ago, and your boy Dick is the next heir."

"Yes; I know."

"But, do you know that the property is worth ten or twelve thousand a year? and I tell you Dick is the next heir. There are I believe some queer conditions about the will. I would have had a look at it, only I have strong reasons for not obtruding myself on government officials, but *you* can ask for it straight enough."

"I suppose so."

"What's come to you, Judith? I thought *even* I would be welcome with such tidings."

"I am inclined to throw up the game, confess everything to Mr. Acland, and retire to a penitentiary if I am to be persecuted by you."

"You would never be such a cursed fool," cried Blake fiercely, "now, when the best chance we have ever had, has turned up." Mrs. Acland laughed faintly. Keeping her cold light eyes fixed on his, she said, "I am certainly a fool to trust myself here with you; there is murder in your eyes."

"Nonsense, Ju. I am no fool, and will certainly not kill my goose with the golden eggs."

"True," she returned with the same indifference which had roused his ire.

"Now listen to me, Ju. Something has gone wrong with you—I see that—never mind; there is scarce anything that money won't set right. Do you know where Dick is? Yes; well, you go and see the will. Old Maynard's, I mean, the fellow that made the money and bought Leighton Abbot; then send for Dick, make it up with him. I never approved of your turning him out."

"Oh! you did not approve"—bitterly—"perhaps you also disapproved of the only means I could contrive to get the money you needed."

"Well, I did rather; of course, it could not be helped; but don't let us waste time on bosh. Explain to Dick the good fortune before him, promise to devote yourself to his cause, make him understand that he and you are under deep obligations to *me*. With that will behind him he can raise a lot of money and lift me out of my difficulties, and make you independent of old Acland."

"Thank you! I am not dependent on Mr. Acland. He is dependent on me. So, my son's first use of his hopes is to discount them for the benefit of his father's worst enemy?"

"I can't think what's come to you, Judith. You are so d——d cantankerous. Of course, the money will not come out of your pocket."

"Tell me," she asked slowly, "how it is you have ventured here?"

"Because I have been cleaned out in Valparaiso. It is too long a story to tell you how I got to Havre, and so on to London, as a negro melodist; anyhow, I saw the child's death in the paper, and determined to put you up to your work as regards Dick. Don't be cross, old girl. I don't want to do you any harm, but I am bound to take care of myself."

"A duty you are certain to fulfil. Now you have told me your errand tell the driver to stop at the Temple Station."

"Not so fast," said Blake, with a heavy frown. "You are not going to send me empty away. I have tried a lot of things, but somehow nothing turned up trumps. I have spent a lot of money waiting for you. I went to your house, and heard you were at Folkestone—all of you, the governor included—so I did not like to go down while he was there, nor to write either. Now I have barely a sou left; I am afraid I should have been driven to write a playful imitation of my friend Robert Acland's signature on a slip of paper to secure to-morrow's food had I not fallen in with you, my darling," and his bold black eyes, from which he had removed the blue spectacles, dwelt on her with a mocking, devilish glance.

Mrs. Acland shuddered—nor did she reply at once; in this

dilemma she thought of the man she had nearly succeeded in murdering. He would protect her from Blake. He would never suspect her of having put that bottle of chloroform under his drooping head. Yes; the husband she had despised, defied, tortured, would be forbearing and merciful, even though he suspected that she had done her best to destroy his son's character. She must temporize with this brute; she must gain time, and throw herself on Philip's mercy.

"As to money," she said in an altered tone, "I have but five pounds and a little silver about me. I will give you the five pounds, and as I am specially engaged to-morrow with Mr. Acland you must wait to see me till the day after; it will cost me some trouble to stay in town, but I will do it for your sake, and we must see what we can contrive for our mutual benefit out of this new turn of Fortune's wheel. Where can I meet you?"

"Now you are talking like the woman of sense I always thought you were. Hand out the sovs. It is not a note, I hope."

"No;" taking out her purse and handing him the gold pieces.

"Good. Well, about meeting. I am not sure; some quiet place out West would be safest. There is a decent restaurant in Wilmington Street, near to Westbourne Grove. Here; I will write the name and number for you. I will engage a private room. Mind you bring some more money with you, or I'll be kept in pledge; bring Dick's address and some writing materials in your bag. What hour shall we fix?"

"Let me see; that will be Friday," returned Mrs. Acland, as if considering deeply. "I am afraid it would not be safe to promise earlier than two o'clock."

"Two o'clock will do prime," returned Blake cheerfully. "It will go hard if we don't manage a good haul, and Dick will not be a penny the worse. I have an idea myself, but I would like to compare it with yours, for you have a capital head, Ju—always had."

He scribbled a line on a leaf of his note-book, which he tore out and gave to her.

"You flatter me," she said with a peculiar smile, and put away the leaf in her purse. "I do not pretend to sentiment, but for my own sake I should be glad to know you were provided for life."

"I dare say you would, no matter how," returned Blake with a chuckle. "Well; we will see what we can do;" he adjusted the spectacles again. "I should be undone were I to forget my goggles."

"Now, as there is no more to be said I must leave you."

"You are in a monstrous hurry, Ju, but I suppose you can't well stay longer. Is old Acland up in town?"

“He *is*.”

“Doing the usual treadmill I suppose ; off at nine ?”

“Yes. I shall meet him in town to-morrow afternoon—which is one of the reasons I cannot meet you,” said Mrs. Acland with an air of simple sincerity, as if she had not invented the appointment for the occasion. “Pray, make the driver stop, or drive back to Charing Cross.”

“Very good. See about some more cash, Judith. I am not exorbitant. I’ll make twenty pounds do until we can borrow something for Dick on a *post obit*.”

Blake talked on in a careless rambling way that struck Mrs. Acland as unlike his former manner. She kept silent ; she was almost exhausted by the fearful strain to which her nerves had been subjected.

But she was not to rest yet.

As soon as she was free from Blake she hastened to the ladies’ waiting-room and there penned a few hasty lines to Philip Cranston.

“I will call on you at the address I have just found at Charing Cross Hotel to-morrow about one ; let nothing prevent your being at home to see me.” This safely posted she at last sought the shelter of her own house, stupefied by the painful excitement through which she had passed, and half surprised at the sense of terror and reluctance with which she contemplated her expected interview with Philip Cranston.

“It would indeed be a strange freak of fortune,” she murmured to herself, “if he was saved from me to befriend me. What if I send *him* to keep the tryst with Blake ?”

(*To be continued.*)

TWO WOMEN.

By S. D. SPICER.

PART I.

“Being so very wilful . . .”—*Tennyson*.

THE one strong, noble, beautiful. The other? Well, in the other you might soon discover the clay foot of the golden image that Wilfred Eldon had set up.

The one was called Mary.

The name of the other was Kate.

Names characteristic of both. For Mary was (as one of her name should be) steadfast, compassionate, trustful. Kate was a creature of many moods, tearful and smiling all at once, impulsive, uncontrollable. She was most often called “Kitty;” the other was always Mary.

Wilfred loved Kate with the fierce passion of a flame that flares up quick and dies out. The strong burning of a red-hot fire that will last when the flame has gone, this was not Wilfred’s love for Kate. “Wilful,” we who formed his home life called him. It was a forecast of the man.

Wilful! how well I remember the trouble he gave those best and dearest to him. And yet, as a mother loves most the child who has cost her most, so Wilfred’s mother loved the wayward boy better than any one of the home flock who had never given her a moment’s uneasiness. It is the prodigal in this life who most often gets the fatted calf. It was so with Wilful.

I used to know Wilfred Eldon well—indeed, I knew all the family—his mother was my oldest friend. We had been friends as children. We had shared the same masters, the same classes, we had been “presented” together at the same drawing-room. When she married Lord Walter, I had just taken a cottage on a sweet Surrey common called Sunny Rest, and Lady Walter when she became a widow joined me there. That is, she took a little house close to my cottage,—the gardens only divided by a low wall where the ivy clung and a tall fir-tree made a shelter. I remember Master Wilful would get up into that tree and climb the wall into my garden, a sturdy creature just emancipated from petticoats, and the only whipping he ever got in those days was

administered by my hands for oft-repeated trampling on my garden borders.

I had been five years at Sunny Rest when Sarah Eldon came. The interrupted friendship of our girlhood was renewed and I look back now to those happy years as some of the brightest of my life. I had never wished to marry. I enjoyed to the full other people's children and made it my delight to be useful to them.

An "old maid" has a corner of her own that nobody else can fill, that is, if she is the happy, contented, warm-hearted creature she ought to be. But then, she must be an "old maid" from choice, not from compulsion.

Wilfred was the eldest of the little toddling creatures who used to come about my knees for sugar-plums and coax for stories on wet afternoons. What talks their mother and I used to have when the children were in bed, sitting "knees and nose into the fire" (I call it), or rambling in beautiful summer evenings along the sweet Surrey lanes.

Surely there are few things more lovely on God's earth than friendship—friendship coming out of the secret sympathy that binds two souls together. Do you say you do not believe in it between women? I have seen it a sacred thing unbroken till death.

Our talk, Lady Walter's and mine, was most often about her children, their character, their future. What great things Wilfred was to do! How proud his mother was of him. And after all, the boy's career was to be only a disappointment, a failure with one exception, yes—there was an exception—I had forgotten Mary Meadows.

Well, when he was old enough Wilfred Eldon was sent to school.

"He will be first in his class, and by-and-by head of the school," his mother said confidently, and then as the months slipped on, "it is only a private school, you know, boys haven't a chance; wait till he's at Eton, and you'll see!" And after a year or two Wilfred went to Eton. There were prizes enough there to win, but somehow Wilful, as we still called him, never succeeded in getting one. "He is so strong and full of life," said his mother, "how can you expect a high-spirited boy to be amongst the 'saps?' Wait till he is in the Boats, he'll get into the Eight and be Captain before long. With his great abilities and strength of purpose, for Wilfred can be determined, Elizabeth, you know, when he sets his mind to do a thing." (I did indeed know that he could be determined, but I called his determination *obstinacy*.) But neither among the "wet Bobs" or the "dry" did Wilfred Eldon carry off the prize.

His defeats sat lightly on him. He was always going to do better next time, and so handsome, imperturbable, unsuccessful Wilfred finished his school-days and went to Oxford.

The next thing that happened and the most natural was that he fell in love, as the expression is.

I was tying up my sunflowers, there had been a storm in the night and they were dreadfully blown about, when Lady Walter came to announce the great event.

"Oh, my dear Elizabeth, I've such news for you! do leave those stupid things alone and attend to me." For I had my tallest flower in my hand, fastening it up while she spoke. I felt a little aggrieved that my sunflowers which had been quite a show all the season should be so lightly spoken of. "One moment, Sarah," I said, "I will only just tie up this one, and then——"

"But Wilful's engaged to be married! There, Elizabeth, there's my news; what do you say to that?" I was at her side in an instant on the path, and forgetful of my old garden-gloves, clasping her white hands and kissing her all at once.

"Come in out of the sun," I said, for she had run to me without hat or cloak, straight from her letters and the breakfast-table, and I drew her in at my open window, and we sat down together. I remember now the scent of the roses, some red and white roses on the table.

"Isn't it delightful?" cried my friend, wiping her eyes, where the tears of joy stood; "I think she is worthy of my boy!"

"Mary Meadows!" was my surprised exclamation, "I often have thought it might come to this, but I hardly dared hope so much for Wilfred."

I remember I exclaimed so much at the boy's good fortune that Wilfred's mother became a little offended. A princess would hardly have been worthy of him in his mother's eyes.

Sweet Mary Meadows! the rest of us all marvelled at Wilfred's luck in winning such a woman's love, but it was not "luck," for all God's creatures move by His direction, and human hearts are no exception to His rule.

When my friend left I sat lost in thought, and only awoke from my abstraction when the garden scissors on my lap fell to the floor, and then I started up and went back to my flowers. Wilfred and Mary seemed painted on the large green leaves, and amongst the yellow petals of my sunflowers. The sweet garden scents came cool and refreshing after the storm. Would Mary's life with Wilfred Eldon be like my garden? all sunshine and singing birds? this was what I asked for her. Somehow I found myself thinking more of her than of him.

I had known Mary Meadows all her young life. She was what I had once heard Wilfred himself call her, "the perfection of woman," but then I never expected heedless, thoughtless Wilfred to succeed in winning perfection. If there was a superiority in Mary Meadows above others, it was nothing tiresome, nothing superior in the sense in which that word is often rendered odious.

It was gentleness combined with strength of purpose and withal a great humility; "womanliness" described her best.

Mary Meadows was not beautiful in the strict sense of the term, but her eyes—dark, speaking eyes—showed the soul within, and a resolute mouth spoke her indomitable will; for the rest she was small, but you could not call her insignificant. Wherever you found her she was a presence in the place. A woman to lean on, a very tower of strength in difficult times, a true "help-mate" to the man who married her. Was I not justified in my opinion of Wilfred Eldon's great good fortune? Already, in the years gone by, her influence had kept him from boyish scrapes, and worse, I believe, for he had been accustomed to confide in her and to follow her advice. It had not been of her seeking, for there are strong natures that must exercise influence over others whether they will it or no. We shall never know this side of the grave the component parts of soul and body, or what goes to make up that wonderful magnetic power that one soul exercises over another, and that we call influence, for want of a better word.

We all know it exists, and we all experience it some time in our lives, for good or evil. Heaven send that in our case it be for good.

Wilfred was as wax in Mary's hands, and could no more help himself than the needle can help the power of the magnet to draw it to itself.

Mary herself seemed unconscious of her great power. The small artifice of meaner souls was no part of her nature, or she might long ago have taken the boy's heart and made it captive, as the cruel do every day, only to fling away afterwards, crushed and bleeding, as a trophy of her power. But when, at last, the time came when he told her of his love, she found her heart had already gone to him, it was no longer in her own keeping, and so Wilfred Eldon won a prize! And I, musing on all this, thought how many a noble head and heart has failed to take any out of life's lottery, and this man with his selfish indolence and wasted opportunities, was to be blessed, as few are blessed, with a good woman's love. I marvelled as I thought it all over amongst my sunflowers and the birds singing.

When first Lady Walter brought the news, there was a name my tongue did not frame, but in my heart I said, "Thank God it is not Kate Verity!"

Mary Meadows came to see me. She was very happy, very content to be Wilfred's wife. We sat under the shadow of the house and watched the harvest moon, as I had often watched it, sail above the fir-trees and the big cedar on my lawn. The cedar branches were soon all silvered, and you could see beyond, where the meadow lands stretched to the river, the corn cut and some sheaves standing, each sheaf with its own particular shadow clear and bright under the moon.

"You see I've known him so long," she said, "and I think I loved him long before he made me say I did. He got into my heart years ago, I did not know it myself, and he was there all the time." She gave a low happy laugh. "Dear old Wilful!" The river ran through the cornfields, a gossamer thread in a silver mist. "Let us go in," I said presently, "the dew is rising."

"One minute more," she begged, and gave a sigh. A shadow had come on her clear open brow, the Madonna brow I used to call it, likening it to one of Raphael's pictures I had seen.

"What troubles you?" I asked. She looked at me with her honest, fearless eyes, and said, "Kate Verity!" She said it so simply, and without hesitation, though her voice trembled a little. I remained silent, not knowing what to say.

"He is such a boy," she went on after a moment, "you may smile, I know he is two years my senior, but somehow I have always felt myself to be the elder of the two—he is a baby in the hands of that designing woman."

"But Wilfred is yours by right now," I said eagerly. "Cannot you forbid him to——" She held up both hands, so small and white, in the twilight of the garden, as though to stop my further speech; I think only the soft witchery of the moonlit dusk would have made her speak of this, even to me.

"There is nothing to forbid," she said hurriedly, "I would not make the subject of so much importance—I would not have him think——" She threw back her small shapely head with a gesture that meant much.

"Have you said nothing to him?"

"Oh, he knows what I feel, what I have always felt about this intimacy. Long ago I warned him. I could not think then that he could ever be more to me than a dear young brother, to be advised and scolded too—for I never spared him in the old days,—I told him plainly of his folly, I could not bear to see him throw himself away. Her influence was always harmful, for one of his character especially. Miss Verity is not a bad woman, but——"

"But she is not a good friend for Wilfred," I said emphatically.

She went on: "Lady Walter thinks the friendship, if it ever really existed, was broken off long ago. I would not undeceive her, but I warned Wilfred, just three years ago, that I would write and tell his mother if this sort of thing went on. I said, 'you cannot have us both; you must choose between your friends!' He had just come from Oxford, and his mother seemed to like to know that I could help him ever so little to good."

The shadow went out of her face.

"I remember the day so well—the day of our conversation. It was very hot, and he took me on the river, and we rowed as far as Cranley Elms. I scolded him first because he confessed he was not doing his best at his work, and he looked up in my face with

his earnest eyes—you know how Wilfred *can* look,” she broke off suddenly with a shy blush; “and—well, he said, if he had somebody to work for, something to look forward to, he would be a very different man. Never mind what I answered. I gave him no hope, I thought him so young; and then, I did my best to make him see the ruin he was bringing on himself and that poor woman. She was governess then to those Hawtreys, you remember?—the people who used to live at King’s Acre? He promised me to see no more of her. He knew, as I did, that he could not marry her in the face of his mother’s opposition. He kept his promise till a chance meeting at the church in the town revived the old friendship. Poor Miss Verity, I can only draw one inference from her taking the post of organist at King’s Acre, when the Hawtreys left. She is much to be pitied. I have none but kindly thoughts of her.”

“Poor Kitty Verity!” I echoed. “But I feel angry with her too. Wilfred’s mother, his best friends, we have all suffered through her, Mary. I must say, she behaves badly in seeking to retain his affection.”

“Ah, but who could help loving my Wilfred?” Mary Meadows said very softly. Her eyes shone with the new light in them, and I thought the old poet spoke truly who first said, “love is blind.” I, too, had a soft corner in my heart for this provoking irresistible Wilfred, and I caught myself thinking that I liked Wilfred’s faults better than most people’s virtues.

The wedding was to be soon, and I felt all would go right then, but the next thing I heard was that Mary Meadows had been called away to the death-bed of her only sister. The sister did not die for a whole six weeks. The days dragged themselves away, leaving us all anxiously expectant, and Wilfred more miserable than anybody. It was during this waiting-time that I heard of Wilfred so often in the town—I mean our little post town of King’s Acre. At last, after a sleepless night and two days’ bad headache—I always get headaches if I have something on my mind—I determined to take the bull by the horns, in other words “speak.”

I was in my garden when my bull appeared, looking so meek and dejected that I felt it would be difficult to find the horns on which to lay my hold. My bull was shorn—he was only a silly sheep after all, I thought. He greeted me with his sunny smile and a wistful look in his blue eyes—blue eyes like violets fringed with long curling lashes—“the Eldon eyes” his mother used to call them, for the duke’s family were all handsome, and Lord Walter had been the youngest son. I went with him into the house.

“You sent for me, Aunt Lib?” (The children had always been taught to call me aunt, though I was only their mother’s adopted

sister.) "Nothing wrong with my mother or the brats?" he asked, drawing forward the most comfortable chair in the room and proceeding to lay his long limbs within it. Lady Walter and the younger children were at the seaside.

"No, Wilfred, no," I answered nervously, hardly knowing what I said in my anxiety to begin the all-absorbing subject I had at heart. Mary Meadows so far away, his mother absent from home, I nerved myself to the disagreeable task I had undertaken. I began by stirring the fire to conceal my agitation.

"The autumn days are chilly, don't you find them so?"

"Let me do that for you." He took the poker from my hand. "You are clearing out the best part of the coals. What is the matter, Aunt Lib? You seem rather jumpy this morning. Now, if it was me, I should take a brandy and soda, a little nip neat would be better for you perhaps."

"Nonsense, my dear, don't talk rubbish. I don't require any stimulant, what I do really desire is a little conversation with you. You know, dear boy, I have scarcely seen you since you were engaged to be married."

He was leaning back lazily now in his arm-chair, but he started up:

"Aunt Lib, what's wrong? I'll take any odds something's gone wrong, or I'm in for a blowing-up from my mother, and she has commissioned you to deliver it second-hand."

"No, no, I have not heard from your mother. I want to talk to you myself; to speak to you about—well, about Miss Verity." I was surprised at my own boldness when I had said the name.

"Kitty Verity! What in the name of fortune made you pitch upon her?"

He appeared to be so genuinely surprised that I felt a blush overspread my face as if I was the guilty party. I hurried on.

"Of course, I have no right to speak, but then, why do you go so often into King's Acre and stop there so long? It must be—forgive me if I wrong you." His open boyish face was red enough now.

"Who told you I went into the town?"

"Oh, so many people. *They* don't remark on it to your discredit. They think you go to play tennis with the Castle people, but I happen to know you dislike them and the Browns too, so I felt certain that—that—oh, my dear boy," I broke off, "do you go to see Kitty Verity?"

"I see her sometimes. It is only out of kindness. You know she was very good to me once when I sprained my ankle, oh, years ago now, and one can't be ungrateful, especially as she's poor and very badly off for friends. What? Of course, I shall tell Mary. She has a right to know my movements. I'm off, Aunt Lib, I'm sorry to say." He pulled out his watch. "I told that fellow Andrews

I'd be with him at three about my new rifle, and it's—by Jove, it's past that now."

I caught his arm.

"Believe me, Wilfred, Mary is right in objecting, as your mother has always objected, to this intimacy, the influence is so bad for you. Mary is right."

"Mary is always right."

He said it so straight from his heart that my eyes filled.

"You are a dear fellow; be worthy of Mary. Oh, Wilfred, you have a treasure for your wife."

He wrung my hand hard, and the look in his eyes showed me he understood the meaning of my words, and as I turned away I thanked God in my heart.

PART II.

"Never morning wore to evening,
But some heart did break."

If there was an unaccountable attraction for Wilfred in this Miss Verity (I used to call it "fascination"), it had no power to enthrall him when once his heart was in Mary's keeping; for Mary Meadows held his best self, and it is by his better nature that a man is won at last. Passion may get the upper hand for a time, but where the good is not dead, only dormant, the heart awakes to the least touch of the master hand that holds the key to its true self. And in the past, was the woman most to blame or the man? Was it her fault or his?

You who have experience will tell me, perhaps, that the game is always in the woman's hands; if so, Kate Verity had only herself to thank, when she played and lost. Alas! she had staked her all upon the game.

When first Miss Verity came to King's Acre, it was as governess to some friends of ours, and when they left, she stayed on as organist at Saint Anne's. I think Wilfred first made her acquaintance at a tennis party in the neighbourhood. Miss Verity was clever and accomplished, a woman of middle age, but with a charm in her bright *naïve* manner that made her appear much younger. It was while his mother was abroad that Wilfred was thrown much with the pretty governess. The time of year was summer; the place, the sweet Surrey lanes wreathed with honeysuckle and dog-roses, the scented breath of pine-woods coming across the green; the time, evening. *Voilà tout!* Is anything more wanted to fill in the picture? And in a rash moment Wilfred gave a promise—only a half promise; but how dangerous are those half promises? Mary Meadows found it out, only by reading his face.

Thank God, his was a face still open and clear enough for loving eyes to read, though a stranger would have failed to decipher what was written there.

"You do not intend to make Miss Verity your wife—you know as well as I do that it is impossible, and yet—oh, Wilfred!" No further words were needed, the look in her eyes was more terrible to the young man than words. She was his lady, his "Beatrice." The world would be the better if the young Dantes in it could always find a Beatrice as this one did, could look to her, follow her guidance. Let it be only an ideal love, it will serve as a star, a talisman amidst the murky waters that are ever rising to stain the fresh young hearts battling in the flood. And Wilfred had stammered out, "I told her the truth. I said it was no promise; I did, on my honour, Mary." Would he ever forget how his lady stood confronting him like some avenging angel in her just indignation. "We had better leave your *honour* out of the question." The poor fellow in his misery declared himself to be unworthy even to be Mary's friend, and yet, after all, he won her for his wife. Who amongst us can understand the human heart, or fathom its mysterious depths? This man had so little to give that was worth having, and yet two women loved him with all their hearts, and one of them was Mary Meadows.

Long ago, one spring-time, amidst the pink and white apple-blossoms, under the orchard wall near St. Anne's, Wilfred recalled that foolish half promise once made to Kitty Verity. One evening, after church was over and the pretty organist hung upon his arm, Wilfred faltering, with the guilty red mounting to his face, told her he could never hope for his mother's consent, "and besides, there's Mary Meadows," he blurted out. "I could never think of what I spoke of once; I was mad, insane; you tempted me; will you forgive me?"

She only laughed in his face.

"What a boy you are to say that to me; what has Mary Meadows to do with it?"

"I love her," he said, simply, "but she is far beyond my reach, the stars are not farther!"

The woman at his side started as if she had been stung, and then she laughed again, a laugh that had no mirth in it. "You are really growing quite poetical," she said. But the next moment she had stopped in her walk and leaning half against the old red wall and half within his arm, she looked up into his eyes with a playful smile, though her red lips quivered. "You fancy that you love her," she said, lightly, "because she has grown up with you, has formed part of your young life (as the books say). But what can you, my poor Wilfred, find to cling to in such a superior nature, such peerless goodness? Tell me now, isn't your poor little Kitty, who never sees a fault in her darling love, who worships the very ground you tread on, more part of

yourself, more accessible than—the starry heights above?” she mimicked his gesture. But he, in his turn, drew away from her.

“Spare me the comparison,” he said; “why, Kitty, if I like you—if I love you—it is as different a thing to that with which *she* inspires me as dark from light! her heart compared to yours, Kitty, is as roses to blades of weedy grass!” The words were ill-chosen for a lover’s lips under the sweet spring blossoms with the woman he loved—or should have loved—hanging on his arm. His arm! while his heart was full of that other image, blotting out this poor, pretty face with which he had trifled away the precious hours. The words had gone forth inadvertently truthful, and could not be recalled. Yet after the first burst of sorrow and wrath was over, Miss Verity allowed herself to be consoled, and poor, silly Wilfred had yielded to her broken-hearted reproaches, her passionate endearments, and was faster than ever in the toils for having tried once to break from them.

Again, I ask in my bewilderment, who can fathom the human heart? What pleasure, think you, could Kate Verity find in seeking to retain this man’s affections against his will? Could she not see that her passionate love was as nothing against Mary’s long tried affection? But guilty blindness brings its own punishment.

Wilfred dared not tell her of his engagement. I found out afterwards that his visits to King’s Acre were made with the intention of breaking it to her himself, but he was a coward about giving pain, and he failed every time in the telling.

To easy-going, indolent natures like Wilfred’s, there is always an anxious desire to avoid pain for themselves by keeping well with all the world. But there is sometimes real kindness in giving pain to others; such dealing requires a courage of its own that is only to be found amongst the strong and generous. These will administer the painful warning, the smarting rebuke cost them what it may, and these are they who reap their reward in wrong set right, or if that may not be, in the peace that is not of earth.

One morning after that on which we had talked together, Wilfred Eldon was down at the river-side when Kate Verity came.

The wind had made a carpet of the autumn leaves, silver and bronze scattered on the river-banks and along the towing-path where her feet must pass.

She walked over the dead leaves to her dead love. Had she not cherished her blindness she must have seen it long ago—for Kate Verity was no fool—his love had existed only as a transient flame and when she came looking for its warmth, she found only ashes and the fire dead.

And Wilfred, in this extremity, brought face to face with the woman he had wronged, would have cut off his right hand to undo the doing of three years ago. But the present is ours and the future; the past is no longer in our keeping, though we shed

tears of blood ; it has gone forth long ago only to meet us before God's Judgment-seat.

The wind in the elm trees seemed to sob out her passionate words in unison. "Wilfred!" her voice sounded as he had never heard it before. "Look at me! is it not for the last time? Listen! for you shall hear me—you who get your own selfish pleasure at any cost, and care not for the pain you inflict in the getting it!"

"I care, I do care," he faltered out between the gusty pauses of her passionate speech—the voice, tearful at first, grown dry and hard in the presence of the man who had once told her he loved her.

"Care? I believe you! such sorrow will not give you one sleepless night, nor spoil your appetite for dinner, nor make you shed one tear!—I know you, Wilfred Eldon, better than you know yourself—shallow, fickle, faithless that you are!" Her eyes blazed out the words her tongue was telling, more eloquently than the words, scorn, indignation, contempt, that left him no room for utterance had he had anything to say, but he was speechless. Yet he would not have fled from her then, he would heal the wounds his hands had inflicted on her.

His soft, pliant nature was capable of generosity even to self-sacrifice when once his selfish indolence was overcome—a mistaken generosity where Kate Verity's happiness was concerned. Yet, when he did speak his words were harsh out of the very bitterness of his self-reproach that sent the red blood rushing into his fair young face. For he was young yet, and the thought of the past in which he had played a double part, yielding to her fair words and the soft witchery of her eyes, was unbearable to him. Deceit was no part of his nature and the harvest he had to reap was wormwood; was it any comfort that she who had helped to sow the seed reaped it with him? "Kitty!" he began desperately, "why do you come crying and raving? you had better go upon the stage you have so often talked about, if you want to do that sort of thing; pray don't come and make a scene out here—you rave like an actress."

"You never loved me," she almost screamed, and clenched her hands as if to strike him; "fool that I was, I believed you and you have deceived me!"

Sometimes—it may be at the supreme moment of our life—words trivial perhaps and long forgotten shape themselves so vividly in the brain that it seems as if a voice spoke them. To Wilfred came lines he had learnt as a boy at school:

"False, fleeting, perjur'd Clarence—
That stabb'd me in the field by Tewksbury."

The river spoke them, so it seemed to him; the dead leaves floating down repeated them. Stabbed? yes had he not stabbed this

woman? wounded her to death under the blossoming hedgerows and the red sunset sky one summer evening long ago?

"False, fleeting, perjured," repeated the river answering his thoughts.

"Oh God," he cried, "have you no pity?"

"Pity? what pity had you when you took my poor love only to throw it back to me? Mary Meadows, the woman who is jealous of me—who in the midst of her wealth of friends and home, grudged me my only joy, the one love of my life—Mary Meadows has taken you from me, and I hate her, I hate her!" All the strong man's nature within him rose up at her words. His low hoarse tones when he answered, startled Kate Verity in the midst of her passion.

"Jealous?" he repeated, "*you* to say it of *her*? You who tempted me to break faith with Mary, you who stole my love knowing already it was hers—you to say this!" he caught her by the wrist and held it tight in his vehemence.

She gave a little cry. "You are hurting me, let me go!" Then while he looked the tears came welling up into her eyes, and suddenly melting, she sank down at his feet. "Oh pity me," the words came choked with great sobs, "pity me, for *I love you so!*" He saw the tears force themselves down between the hands that covered her face, watched them drop in great splashes on her gown, and never moved to raise her from where she lay on the leaf-strewn grass—decaying leaves like his love for her. At last she raised her head and in her undisciplined grief threw up her arms as if calling all nature to witness. "Why do I love anything so weak, so worthless? yet your very faults are sweet to me; I love the air you breathe—the ground you tread on! Do you hear? you have taken all I had to give—a woman's strong love—you have wound yourself round my heart, and when I would tear you out I cannot! I swear to you, Wilfred, I would if it were possible: I should be a happier woman, but I cannot!—I cannot!" With that exceeding bitter cry she once more buried her face in her hands, and when she looked up at last it was to read in his eyes the sentence of her doom. There was a look on his pale resolute face that told her love had fled for ever, and that all the past must be as if it had never been. She heard the river running still and saw the great trees stretch overhead and the little leaves drop airily down to cover the naked tree roots. The branches would have other leaves next spring, and the tree roots their soft mosses and wildflowers between; but to her no spring would come—she must walk henceforth as in a wilderness bearing her wound.

Shall we pity her the less because this was the fruit of her own hands? Surely our compassion should be the greater, for is not the pain keener when we know we have only ourselves to thank for our own undoing?

And Wilfred?

The sweetest of women was his for life, the girl with the Madonna brow. The angel guardian of his boyhood was to be his helpmate even to old age and death.

What had he done to deserve such a wealth of happiness?

The question was my own, and there was none to answer it.

The prodigal gets the ring and the best raiment—is it out of compassion for his weakness—while the strong suffer hunger and are silent.

These were my thoughts to the sound of Wilfred's wedding-bells.
Mary Meadows is Mary Eldon now.

'NEATH THE MASK.

WE seem to those who see us meet
The careless friends of yesterday ;
They cannot tell that when we greet
The long sad years seem passed away ;
They do not know that in our gaze
Sweet visions of the past arise ;
They cannot mark the stealthy ways
Of communing our hearts devise.

They do not guess that in the past
Dear love-lit hours were mine and thine ;
Our vanished dream, too sweet to last,
Is not revealed by word or sign ;
The swiftest glance you give to me
Is fraught with meaning hidden well ;
The lightest word I breathe to thee
Disguises love I dare not tell.

But though in crowds we stand apart,
With eyes averted, hands impressed,
My heart still seeks and finds thy heart ;
And love, tho' masked, is manifest :
The smothered sigh, the heart's quick thrill,
The passionate pain when each is nigh,
Reveals a love time cannot kill,
For we love still, dear—you and I.

NELLIE FORTESCUE-HARRISON.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE BY SELECTION.

WITH the instincts of a thorough coquette, Lady De Fochsey slightly slackened her horse's speed, as she overtook Lord Littelbrane. If he wished to join her, he should have the opportunity. Thus thinking, she favoured him to one of her sweetest smiles. It was by no means the first time she had smiled upon him; but she told herself that random smiles were like air-wafted seeds, there was always a chance of their bringing forth fruit.

So she smiled on and on, with all a woman's perseverance, and with all a woman's resolution to turn failure into success. This man's impenetrability had piqued her, otherwise she would never have troubled her head about him. He was far too stiff and solemn for her taste. She liked people who could tell a good story, who could appreciate one when they heard it, and who didn't mind calling a spade, a spade. Now, with his lordship, it had to be termed a "trowel," or else an "implement for digging the earth." She liked fun and gaiety and amusement, whereas all he seemed to think about were the "proprieties."

And she was sick to death of them; they had been dinned into her ears ever since her girlhood, and Sir Jonathan, in his time, had frequently waxed eloquent on the subject.

Lady De Fochsey was a woman to whom admiration was as the breath of life. But she possessed a certain amount of worldly sharpness, and had long since come to the conclusion that the best way of attracting men was by amusing them; and if you amused them, it did not do to be too particular either in your manners or your conversation. She had not a very exalted idea of the male sex, nevertheless she could not do without masculine society, and often weakened her own self-respect in the efforts she made to prove agreeable. She could no more help casting an inviting glance at Lord Littelbrane than she could help being a social butterfly. That glance seemed to say, "Oh! do come and talk to poor little me. For goodness sake, don't be so stand-off."

Had it not been for his lordship's late feeling of desolation, he might not have construed the look in this manner, but big with his resolution of committing matrimony, he was more amenable to feminine influences. Therefore he responded to Lady De Fochsey's pretty smile, and cantered up to her side. She immediately checked the chestnut's speed.

"Good morning," she exclaimed gaily. "I have not had an opportunity of exchanging a word with you all this long, long time. You seemed determined on ignoring my existence."

He reddened. His conscience pricked him more than was agreeable.

"Now that is positively unkind of you to say such a thing. Of course one can't speak to everybody who comes out hunting, but you," rather clumsily, "you are different."

"Ahem! that's a mercy: it's gratifying to my feelings to find I am not included in the list of people with whom your lordship cannot condescend to hold converse in the hunting field."

The satire was lost upon him; he only thought her words showed a very proper sense of his position and of the responsibilities entailed by it.

"Oh! Ah! You see there are so many queer folks come out with these hounds that one is bound to draw the line somewhere."

"Of course," she answered with fine irony, "still, it is pleasing to find you do not draw it at me, as I began to suspect. One has feelings, you know," shooting a languishing glance at him, "even although one is only a woman."

"I have feelings too," he said solemnly, looking as grave as an undertaker.

"I'm delighted to hear it, my lord. Upon my word, there have been times when I doubted their existence; I should think they were very uncomfortable ones, judging from your manner."

"They are rather," he admitted, relapsing into silence. He did not wish to do anything precipitate, and he thought he had gone far enough on that tack for the present. There were just one or two little points which he wanted to ascertain before committing himself. Was she a flirt, was she the least bit "loud," and was that pretty waist of hers produced by tight-lacing, or merely the result of natural slimness? He set his face against women compressing this particular portion of their body unduly. It was detrimental to the future race. When he married, he intended to marry with one given object in view. On that point he was quite determined. Nothing else could have induced him to sacrifice his bachelor independence. At forty-six men are apt to regard matrimony as a dubious pleasure; they have become too selfish and too confirmed in their own habits.

But in spite of her companion's taciturnity, Lady De Fochsey had no intention of allowing their interview thus soon to come to

an end. So good a chance of inserting the thin end of the wedge might not occur again for a long time. If he would not talk on one subject she would try another, a very harmless and innocent one, that could not possibly frighten him. Perhaps she had been a little—just a little—too sarcastic, only she did so long to give him a good shake, and put some life and naughtiness into him. He was so frightfully slow and heavy, and yet did not seem to have the least idea of the fact.

“Dear me!” she exclaimed, reining in her horse, with a gesture of feminine exhaustion. “What a terribly long jog! How much further is it to the covert?”

She thought it well to ascertain what time was likely to be accorded her, so as to make a satisfactory disposition of her forces.

“Only about a quarter of a mile,” he answered, taking stock of the width of her chest and the symmetry of her limbs. A narrow-chested woman would not have met with his approbation.

“What a comfort. That’s the most cheering piece of news I’ve heard for a long time.”

“Are you tired, Lady De Fochsey?”

“Dreadfully so; Burnett has been going at such a tremendous pace, I can’t think what has made him in so great a hurry. Poor little Mayfly,” bending forward and patting her horse’s neck, “is quite hot.”

“And her mistress?”

“Her mistress is hot too.”

“Why don’t you walk a little, and take a rest?” he suggested.

“I can’t, I should be left alone, all by myself, miles away from everybody.”

“Not if you will let me stay with you.”

She turned her blue eyes full upon him. She had never noticed before, how weak and watery his colourless ones were, but she softened her voice, and said caressingly:

“*You!* Oh! Lord Littelbrane; you can’t be in earnest, surely?”

“Yes,” he rejoined, growing bolder. “Why not me as well as another?” and the warm blood rushed up into his faded face, giving it quite an animated expression.

Again she smiled; this time with conscious triumph. Her theory of the seedling had proved correct. A clever woman has only to bide her time, and there are very few men who will escape her. If she has good looks as well, then she can count almost surely on the result.

“You—you are very kind,” she said coyly.

“I think you might trust me a little bit,” he said, dropping his voice.

But this was too much for her ladyship’s sense of the ridiculous. She laughed out loud.

“*I have* trusted you, Lord Littelbrane, I have trusted you for

the last three years, and hunted regularly with these hounds. Only—" checking herself abruptly.

"Go on," he said impatiently. "Only what?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Then," raising her limpid blue eyes reproachfully to his, "you have never displayed the slightest wish for me to place faith in you until to-day. I have trusted you enormously, but always— from a distance."

He felt flattered. He was not sharp-witted enough to detect the fine sting of irony present in even her prettiest speeches; at all events, he chose only to extract the honey.

"Lady De Fochsey," he said, with considerable agitation, "will you promise me something?"

"What is it, my lord? A wise woman never makes rash promises. She listens first, and promises afterwards."

"Promise that you will trust me from a distance no longer."

She hesitated a moment. Just a pretty little feminine hesitation, calculated to make him more eager. Then, with another swift upward look of the blue eyes, she said demurely:

"It is for you, not me, to decide the distance. You can hardly expect me to make the first advances. Remember, that for these three long years, I have always been under the impression you did not like me."

Never had Lady De Fochsey appeared to greater advantage than when she uttered these words. The air and exercise had brought a rosy flush to her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled with fun, triumph, and excitement, and her neat, upright figure, with its perfectly fitting scarlet coat, swayed voluptuously to and fro, yielding to every movement of her horse. What matter that the captivating golden fringe, which peeped from beneath her hat, was false; or that she was suffering agonies from the pretty little patent leather boot displayed with such extreme liberality? The soul knoweth its own bitterness, and Lord Littelbrane knew nothing of these things. He saw her only as she appeared to the outside world, not as she was and felt to herself.

"Me! Dislike *you*!" he stammered, beginning to wonder at his own indifference. "How could you have entertained so preposterous an idea?"

"I did not know — I — I thought you tried to avoid me."

"Pure imagination, my dear lady. The fact of the matter is, that in my position, as master of hounds, it does not do for me to display any active preferences out hunting."

"You have certainly succeeded in concealing them admirably," she interrupted, her love of fun getting the better of her prudence. "No one could possibly have suspected that you entertained any. In fact your avoidance of womankind was almost marked."

"I don't profess to be what is called a lady's man," he said, not without a touch of pride.

"And I am sure that nobody would accuse you of being one," she retorted in her most *agaçante* manner.

"But," he went on, blushing up to the very roots of his hair, "I have always admired you. Always," emphatically. "From the very first."

She burst into a peal of silvery laughter.

"Oh! my lord, you do me too much honour. I am charmed to hear it." And through her vain little frame shot a thrill of triumph.

"'Pon my soul, it's the truth. You're an awfully nice woman."

"In that case, you must be a very stupid man not to have found it out sooner."

"By Jingo! I believe you are right. You think I have been remiss in my attentions, do you?"

"I did not say so, my lord."

"No, but your words implied it. Come, tell me. Have I not guessed pretty near the mark?" And he sidled up an inch or two nearer to her. It pleased his vanity to think that she had been hankering after him and felt hurt by his non-sociability.

"I will not make any damaging admissions," she responded, "though perhaps," sighing sentimentally, "it may have occurred to me now and again, that you considered women out of place in the hunting field."

"I swear that I never thought any such thing. Why! Lady De Fochsey, I have always looked upon you as one of the chief ornaments of my hunt."

She could not suppress her mirth. It was so irresistibly funny, after three whole years to find him wake up all of a sudden, for no apparent rhyme or reason, and begin paying her a series of grave and elaborate compliments.

She hardly knew whether he were in earnest or not.

But anyway, she had not the least intention of letting him see how elated she felt. She was far too well versed in the ways of the world to jump down a man's throat who had committed the heinous offence of taking such an unconscionable time in discovering her attractions. True, it was better than not finding them out at all, but he must be made to feel his own stupidity—the pleasures he had missed.

"You will turn my head by so much adulation," she said demurely. "May I venture to ask when you first made the discovery of my being an *ornament* to your hunt? It must have been extremely recent."

Her mocking, airy tone disconcerted, whilst it provoked him. He hated "chaff." And across his mind dimly crept the idea that she was "chaffing" him.

"I have stated a fact," he said reprovingly, "and you seem to doubt my word. I don't like sceptical people."

"Quite right," said her ladyship quizzingly. "They are apt to be bores at times. Nevertheless, I do not think you need feel surprised at my being a little slow of belief. It has only just dawned upon me, that I am an ornament, at all events in your eyes."

"I suppose you thought me blind, then?" he said somewhat huffily.

"I was not quite sure. I believe I considered you blind, after the manner of those who won't see. People say that is the worst form of any."

"Well, my eyes are opened at last, at any rate, and I apologize for all my shortcomings."

"Don't," she said jestingly. "It would take you such a long time. Besides," shrugging her shoulders with a coquettish gesture, "it really would be too absurd to apologize to me, because it has never entered your head to see anything to admire in me, until to-day."

Her persistent levity had the effect of making him more earnest.

"It by no means follows that a man does not admire a woman because he has not the impudence to tell her so to her face," he said, with some heat.

"Don't you think women very easily forgive that sort of impudence?" she asked innocently.

"I hardly know."

"Do you suppose *I* would not have forgiven *you*, Lord Littelbrane." And the arrant little flirt looked wickedly round at him with her babyish turquoise eyes.

"Well—perhaps you might," he answered, beginning to feel his head swim, and his heart beat with a strange and unaccustomed sensation.

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

This was a regular "poser," and he took some time before making any answer. At length he said, with a return to his serious manner:

"I could tell you a good many things if I chose." And he stared straight out over his horse's ears, as if afraid to encounter another glance so full of temptation as the last.

"Do," she said persuasively. "I'm all curiosity."

He looked undecidedly at her for a second, then turned his head away.

"Perhaps I may some day," he responded with growing solemnity, for the immense gravity of the step he had in contemplation weighed upon his spirit like a ton of iron.

If he married, it was from a sense of duty alone, not to gratify his personal inclinations. He was bound to commit matrimony sooner or later, and the lady of his choice was equally bound to be

young, healthy and well-bred, in order to bring into the world a desirable number of little Littelbranes. Selection was a thing he had not studied very deeply, but he opined that it should certainly be exercised amongst people in exalted spheres. His own, he considered a very exalted sphere; and therefore the mother of the future heir of Littelbrane Castle was a being not to be chosen from the low standard of human passion, but from the far nobler and loftier one of the influences she was likely to bring to bear upon posterity.

Keeping this laudable object steadily in view, Lord Littelbrane had slowly come to the conclusion that amongst all the ladies of his acquaintance, Lady De Fochsey best fulfilled the necessary conditions.

Eight-and-twenty was an excellent age. Neither too young nor yet too old. The only thing that distressed him, was that she had had no family by her first husband. But then her married life had been short, and Sir Jonathan very ailing and infirm.

Such were his reflections, as, fatigued by the magnitude of the conversational effort already made, he once more relapsed into silence. But he little knew the daring aggressive nature of the woman with whom he had to deal. Lady De Fochsey had long since recognized him as one of those men who must be "talked to." She found it up hill work, but much practice had rendered her equal to the occasion.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she exclaimed, after a prolonged pause, during which she had been stealthily studying her companion's face, and thinking how terribly vapid and dull its owner was. He started and turned red at being thus attacked.

"At that particular moment I was wondering whether you ever felt lonely," he said simply.

She forgave him his stupidity, since she had been occupying his brain.

"Sometimes," she said, putting on a pensive air. "But why do you ask. Do you?"

"Frightfully, since poor dear Harry died. I don't know that I can go on living by myself much longer. I begin to want a companion very badly indeed.

Lady De Fochsey was an audacious little person, and had the gift of saying the boldest things in the most innocent and artless of manners.

"If that is so, Lord Littelbrane, why on earth do you not get married? Everybody says that you ought to."

"Do they?" he inquired, flushing crimson.

"Yes, everybody. Is there no one you like well enough to make your wife?"

"Yes," he said slowly. "I—I—think—there—is."

"Ah! I thought so. And pray, who may the lucky lady be?"
Something in the expression of his countenance made her

heart palpitate. A strange thought flashed through her mind. A thought full of gratified vanity, but without one particle of sentiment in its composition.

He turned quite pale, opened his lips as if to say something, when alas! alas! a loud tally-ho came ringing through the air.

In another moment they were engulfed by a galloping crowd, and borne far apart.

"Was there ever anything so provoking?" said Lady De Fochsey to herself. "I do believe he meant to propose. And oh, what fun it would have been, and what a feather in my cap!"

As for Lord Littelbrane, the perspiration had gathered in great beads upon his noble brow. He wiped it hastily away, and uttered a sigh which seemed torn from the very depths of his being.

"By jove!" he muttered, "making love is awful work, worse even than I thought. It would have been all over with me in another minute. I was going ahead so deuced fast." Then he shook his head, and murmured disapprovingly: "Too fast—too fast by a great deal. It's just as well that fox went away when he did. Now I can take another week or two to make up my mind, and think the matter over."

He had no doubts about Lady De Fochsey. It never occurred to him to imagine that if he condescended to ask, she was not prepared to accept with pleasure.

CHAPTER XIV.

HE WON'T FACE WATER.

ALTHOUGH it was now nearly three o'clock, and sportsmen had already indulged in one good gallop, it had by no means abated their keenness. After the long summer's inactivity, they were full of ardour, which even the blindness of the country could not keep in check.

They were just as eager to pursue this second fox as they had been the first, and he took them along at a very fair pace; though after the first ten minutes were over he showed himself in his true colours, and turned out a faint-hearted, twisty brute. This fact, however, did not in the least detract from Bob's pleasure. He was far too much of a novice at the game to care whether hounds ran straight, or round and round in a ring. It was all the same to him, as long as they kept moving on, and he could get plenty of jumping. The jumping, indeed, constituted his chief delight. He thought far more of it than of fox and hounds. They were quite subordinate considerations, as compared with the glorious and intoxicating sensation of feeling yourself up in the air and never knowing in exactly what fashion you would descend to the earth. There was an element of danger in the

whole business which gave it a special charm. One moment your heart was in your mouth ; the next, words failed to express the sudden elation which took possession of every faculty, and made the pulses thrill with ecstasy. But The Swell and his rider were no longer so exactly of the same mind as they had been earlier in the day.

That fastidious animal began to consider that his powers had been quite sufficiently exerted. He was too wise and old a hunter to love jumping for jumping's sake. He looked upon every unnecessary leap as an indignity to his understanding, and grew more and more sulky in consequence.

His late master had almost invariably ridden him first horse, and sent him home early. He could not see the fun of being kept out so long, and hankered after his comforting warm mash and good old oats. His buoyancy and spirits departed. It was almost with a feeling of resentment that he turned his head away from home, and for the second time joined in the chase. His ill-humour soon became evident. He no longer fenced as faultlessly as in the morning. One or two places he negotiated quite slovenly, crashing right in amongst the thorns and binders with his hind-legs.

So badly indeed did he behave, that Bob, as he sailed down at a big hedge, newly plashed with a very blind ditch on the near side, into which all the lopped off twigs had been cast, deemed it advisable to rouse him up a little bit. The Swell resented the process and the manner in which it was done. He missed those subtle touches of hand and heel to which he was accustomed. His mouth was fine and very sensitive.

Bob gave it a job, and the horse immediately tossed up his head, with the result that he almost put both fore-feet into the ditch, and only succeeded in getting over with a desperate flounder, which landed him on his knees.

Crack, crack, rang an awful report in Bob's ears as he was jerked violently forwards, and then nearly as violently back, whilst The Swell righted himself, grunting with terror and indignation. His unhappy rider knew what had happened. He needed not to be told. The disaster which he feared, with almost morbid fear, had taken place at last. He glanced hurriedly at his nether limbs.

Yes, there they were ! Those two abominable elastic straps, dangling down about a quarter of a yard in length, from the hem of his trousers. One of them had even a little square bit of cloth still sticking to it, which proved that the wrench must have been considerable. An unutterable horror seized him. A kind of sinking shame. And yet he did not realize the full extent of his misfortunes until he had galloped half way across a fifty acre field.

Then he began to feel odious and horrible sensations of dis-

comfort. They seemed to come creeping slowly, slowly upward and to run all along his spine. Warm as he was, a shudder passed through his frame. He tried not to look downwards, but a species of fascination forced him to do so.

Unhappy young man! The man who had fancied himself superior to clothes, and who affected to despise boots and breeches. What did he see, you ask?

He saw two inches of white leg—disgustingly white, that made the matter so much worse—fully exposed to public vision; whilst his stockings had wriggled themselves into the heels of his boots, and his trousers were up to his knees. Pitiable spectacle! With the agony of desperation, he tried to pull the one up and the other down. It afforded only temporary relief. The wretched things would not stop in their place. And all this time hounds were running well, even if not at a furious pace. Had there been a gate close by he would have hailed it with joy, and hidden his diminished head amongst the roadsters. But there was none. For once Stiffshire failed to supply the desired commodity. He *must* go on riding, and he *must* go on jumping, whether he liked it or not.

Overwhelmed with confusion, all of a sudden he heard a loud guffaw. Turning sharply round in the saddle, he perceived, carefully crawling through a handy gap, no less a person than his old antagonist, General Prosieboy. That man seemed to have a knack of turning up on every occasion, just when he was least wanted. At the present moment he was evidently gloating over Bob's discomfiture. His fat old sides literally shook with laughter, whilst his face assumed a deeper and more purple hue than its wont. Perhaps Bob was unreasonable; but the sight of that old gentleman simply maddened him. It seemed to set every nerve quivering and throbbing, and added a thousand times to his distress. He would have given a hundred pounds at that moment to have been able to punch General Prosieboy's head. There was a murderous instinct within him, which, if not quelled, might lead to terrible results.

Clapping spurs into The Swell he fled precipitately, as the only way of escaping from his tormentor.

But whither?

He did not think—he did not care, so long as he was somewhere near the hounds, and away from the rest of the field.

For five whole minutes he rode like a madman; cramming his horse at all sorts of break-neck places, now crashing into a bullfinch, anon scrambling over fences, again smashing recklessly through timber. The Swell had never been so utterly amazed and disgusted in the whole course of his career. His legs were like a pincushion. They were stuck full of thorns, his sides were dark with crimson gore, and a long red scratch disfigured the stifle of his near hind leg. To look at him, he might have been a

miserable hireling, whose rider was bent on having his two guineas' worth to the very last farthing.

Presently Bob grew calmer. For a hasty backward glance had shown him that not a soul was following in his footsteps. All he wanted was to get away from the crowd, and to escape their gibes and jeers.

But before long, his thoughts took a different turn. He began to imagine that he was entirely alone with hounds. It never struck him to look to the right or to the left. His eyes were fixed on the light vanishing sterns ahead. Even the recollection of those two white legs faded from his mind, erased by the imaginary glories of his position. Neither was excitement wanting. For none can be greater than that of riding a well-nigh beaten horse at a succession of big fences, and counting surely on a fall at each one. A man's courage is severely tested then—more perhaps than at any other time.

With all his good qualities, The Swell was not a *bonâ fide* stayer.

He could live through a really fast run, first thing in the morning when he came out fresh and well, but although it might take some time to discover the fact, he was a cur at heart. For if he once got ever so little pumped, he never came again that day. The morning gallop had stretched his girths quite as much as he deemed fit. After five and thirty to forty minutes, a twenty-pound screw would have carried a man almost as well to hounds for the remainder of the afternoon.

Besides which natural idiosyncrasies, he had not been out hunting this season and was a little short of condition, like most gentlemen's horses early in November. Bob, however, was not sufficiently experienced to take these things into consideration. He had a good deal to learn yet, before becoming a finished, cross-country performer. The number of jumps you have jumped, does not constitute the sole glory of fox-hunting, as before long he was destined to discover. Wise is he, who, nursing his horse, looks upon leaping simply as a means to an end.

All of a sudden, straight in front of him, Bob saw the gleam of water peeping coldly out from amongst a fringe of low, stunted willows. As he did so, Matthews' words recurred to him: "He has but one fault, sir. He won't face water."

But he—Bob—was in that state of sur-excitation, when he flattered himself that a really resolute person on The Swell's back was bound to make all the difference. Because a horse refused to look at a brook with one man, he might be persuaded or forced to have it with another. Anyhow, he would not show the white feather, even although he believed there was no one to see what he was about. But his own self-respect shrank from the idea of "funking." Physical cowardice inspired him with a supreme contempt. As for the hounds—well, he forgot to notice whether

they had actually crossed the brook or not. He *thought* they were going to, and that was enough. He never observed how old True-tongue paused on the very brink, and then feathered along the side. Instead of closely watching her movements, he caught his horse by the head, and drove him at the water, just as hard as ever he could.

To his surprise, he found on approaching the brook, that it was bigger than he had suspected. Should that alter his determination? Certainly not.

He raised his whip hand. The Swell swerved away from it; and then—oh, horror! he felt him begin to collapse under him. He dug the spurs into the poor beast's sides and kept him as straight as he could. He held him in such an iron grasp, that he thought the horse was bound to make a bid for it. Not he!

In the very last stride, The Swell stopped dead short, stretched out his neck, lowered his head and gazed in mute obstinacy at the dark depths beneath him. He knew what they felt like. He had tried them once, long ago in his early youth, and had made a mental resolve never, by any chance, to renew their acquaintance. Some might like cold water. *He* did not approve of it. The dry system appeared to him to possess insuperable advantages. And Bob? the rash youth who thought his will was stronger than that of the animal he bestrode, and who did not know that a horse, when he is in earnest, can defy any man ever born! Well, Bob simply flew over his head, like an arrow shot from a bow, and descended plump into the midst of the stream. It was awfully deep! He went right down to the bottom, rolled about in the soft mud, and imbibed more water than he had ever done before or hoped to do again. Gasping and spluttering, he rose to the surface, making frantic endeavours to regain his footing. Roars of laughter greeted his reappearance—real, unfeigned, hearty laughter.

It seemed to him, in that never-to-be-forgotten moment, which crowned all his previous mishaps, as if the whole of the Morbey Anstead Field were congregated on the banks of this fatal brook, and were unanimous in regarding his involuntary immersion as a most excellent joke. If he could have felt any sensations of heat, he would have grown hot with indignation. Even The Swell turned his full blue eye upon him with an air of amiable triumph, which seemed to say: "Ah! you would have done much better to have taken my advice."

It was a terrible thing, having to scramble out on to *terra firma* before all those laughing faces. Nobody appeared to possess the least instinct of pity. Even Lady De Fochsey, his quondam ally, was smiling broadly and was evidently greatly amused.

Poor Bob stood and shook himself like a Newfoundland dog. The water poured from his ears and saturated clothes. The glory of the day had departed. The sky had clouded over, a cold wind

had arisen which whistled across the uplands. He felt chilled to the bone. And then, all at once, a gruff voice from amongst the crowd said :

“ I say, young fellow, how are the legs ? They look whiter than ever after getting such a real good washing. It will save your soap, anyway.”

This sally was received with much tittering and applause.

Bob could have sworn the voice belonged to General Prosieboy, but he failed to perceive that gentleman's whereabouts. Perhaps it was lucky for his grey hairs. It is the last straw which breaks the camel's back.

Bob had endured a good deal, on this memorable day, from the hands of the Mutual Adorationites ! He now felt as if he could endure no more. His wet clothes clung heavily about him, and weighed like a ton. Without saying a word, he clambered laboriously up into the saddle, and rode straight off in the direction of home. Any temporary feeling of elation had been destroyed by his cold bath. A more crestfallen, dejected and miserable young man, it would have been impossible to find in all Her Majesty's possessions. Just when he was particularly anxious to make a favourable *début* in the hunting field, he had contrived to tumble off and provide amusement for every one present. The tears almost started to his eyes. He felt so bitterly humiliated. Swearing was not a habit he greatly approved of, but oh ! how he swore at those “ confounded ” straps, which, rightly or wrongly, he looked upon as the chief cause of his disasters.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLEASURES OF HUNTING.

As soon as he succeeded in reaching the first road, Bob set off at a swinging trot. His teeth were chattering, and his limbs frozen. To make matters worse, the wind increased, till it seemed to blow through his clothes as if they were paper, and chilled the very marrow in his bones. Under these circumstances, it was perhaps excusable that he displayed but little regard for The Swell's fore-legs, and went pounding along at a tremendous pace. After he had gone about a couple of miles, he saw a poor old labourer engaged in the tedious task of breaking stones by the road-side.

Then for the first time it occurred to him, that for aught he knew, he might be going wrong, since he was by no means sure of the way. Therefore, checking his tired horse, he asked : “ Is this right for Straightem Court, my man ? ”

“ Yes, sir, quite right, sir,” came the reply. “ Keep straight on till you pass Killerton village, then turn sharp to the right,

through a bridle-gate, that takes you across the fields almost in to Straightem. It' ull save you a couple of miles, if not more."

"But how am I to find the bridle-gate?" inquired Bob, intent on making sure of his directions.

"You can't possibly mistake it, sir, because there's a sign-post within five yards."

Moved to compassion by the feeble old man's shrunken frame, hollow cheeks and half-starved appearance, Bob fumbled in his waistcoat pocket until he found a shilling.

"Thank you," he said kindly. "There—take this. I have no doubt that it will do you a great deal more good than it will me."

The recipient's blessings followed him as he rode away, and for a few minutes he reflected gravely on the miserable condition of an honest man like the one he had just left, when age and infirmity combined to render the struggle against poverty more and more difficult. What could life mean to him? Only a weary, weary warring against cold and wind and rain; against hunger and fatigue; without amusement, without pleasure; without comfort of any sort. A dreary existence at best, but rendered a thousand times more so by failing health, and the pains of a poor, worn-out old body. The body! Ah! what a drag and torment it was to human beings! If only they could rise above it! And yet even a simple toothache could dethrone the greatest genius from its seat. Brain, psychic force: of what did they avail, when Pain could lay them in the dust so easily and ride triumphant over them? Their very defeat only served to prove the weakness and mortality of man.

But Bob's meditations were cut short by a fresh calamity. The road had been newly mended and was covered with stones. The Swell toed them with the carelessness of a weary animal. Suddenly he trod on a loose flint, and immediately afterwards went dead lame. So lame indeed that trotting was out of the question. It was as much as he could do to walk.

Bob's star was clearly not in the ascendant to-day. He thought that he had already reached the limits of his ill-luck. He found there was still a margin which had not entered into his calculations. The Swell's small ears now bobbed up and down with torturing irregularity. They made him feel like a monster of cruelty.

Dismounting, he proceeded to examine the poor beast's foot, but could perceive nothing to account for his sudden lameness. In truth, it would have taken a pretty powerful magnifying glass to have detected that small, sharp piece of granite, which having penetrated the frog, was causing such exquisite agony.

Being now forced to travel at a foot's pace, Bob considered it was warmer walking than riding, besides he could not help being sorry for the unhappy animal, whose appearance had undergone

such a total transformation since he sallied forth in the morning, champing at his bit, arching his glossy neck and playfully whisking his tail. There was not a symptom of light-heartedness left now.

The unfortunate Swell no longer merited the name. Anything less like an equine dandy could not have been imagined. His sleek bay coat was hard and white with dry perspiration, his sides were disfigured by spur marks, his legs incrustated with mud; whilst his eye wore a dull, glazy look, which told of physical discomfort. If to him had been given the gift of speech, he would probably have said: "My master may be 'plucky,' but never let me see him again—never let me have anything more to do with him. He has ridden my tail off."

Bob trudged sturdily on, till at length he reached Killerton village, and the bridle-gate beyond. Then, when once more a vista of green fields refreshed his eyes, he remounted, thinking that the probabilities were The Swell would go less tender on the soft, springy grass.

In this supposition he was correct, nevertheless it was a weary ride home, cold and slow and miserable. The sort of ride which effectually obliterates any pleasant impressions left by the day's sport, and which makes a man begin to ask himself whether fox-hunting repays the many disappointments and discomforts that must necessarily come in its train.

It was a bad thing for Bob, on his very first acquaintance with the noble pastime, to have arrived at such a stage, but, as before stated, physical misery soon makes a different creature of man, and quickly subdues him.

Our hero followed the track as well as he could, and his spirits slightly revived. But after a time, the path disappeared, swallowed up in a sea of grass, and then he had to trust entirely to his bump of locality—a bump which he did not possess in as large a degree as might have been expected.

Besides, it is by no means an easy thing to thread one's way through a series of narrow gates, in an entirely new country. These huge uninhabited pastures, for which Stiffshire is celebrated all over the hunting world, and which constitute its glory and its renown, are desolate in the extreme. You may go for miles and miles without meeting anything but herds of grazing cattle, woolly sheep, and an occasional rough young colt. The cloud-shadows race across these vast stretches of undulating verdure, and the wind sweeps over them at its icy will. There are scarcely any trees to break its fury. Only a few isolated specimens in the hedgerows, which rear their gaunt, stunted arms to the dull sky, as if imploring that their lives may be granted them. Here and there a great black bullfinch, situated on the summit of some rising hill, lies like a long dark wall against the grey horizon. A magpie flits across the path. Intersected lines of fences break

up the green, rendering it yet more vivid—and this is Stiffshire. Lonely, silent, sullen, undecked by the beauties of Nature, yet withal not destitute of a certain grandeur, born of her vastness and her desolation. A solitary country, that after a time possesses a kind of weird charm for the solitary soul that walks the earth alone. Bob looked about him. Far as eye could reach, not a human habitation was within vision. He began to experience fresh misgivings as to the route. Sometimes the fields were so large that they had two or three gates, and then he was just obliged to guess at the most likely one. But he might have gone wrong a dozen times over, and as the afternoon advanced, would have been many degrees easier in his mind, could he but have reached a road. Many and many a time did he regret having left one. He would not have grudged the greater distance, for the sense of extra security conferred. Already it seemed to him as if he had been hours on his way.

All of a sudden, just when he was settling down into a state of melancholy resignation, he perceived a brand new gate, painted white, about fifty yards ahead. And through the bars of this gate, he saw the moist road glimmering, as the young crescent moon, high up aloft, reflected her pallid face in a little pool of water. Joyfully he hastened his steps, whilst even The Swell pricked his ears, and seemed to know he was nearing home.

Bob stretched out his arm, and tried to lift up the latch with the crook of his hunting crop. It was secured by some new-fangled process which he did not understand, and yielded not an inch. He made another essay with the same result, another and yet another. Then The Swell grew impatient, and pushed heavily against the barrier with his strong chest. Finding it still closed, he lurched away from it in disgust, as much as to say, "It is for you to open this, not me. I've done my best, now you do yours."

Bob did all he could to coax him up to the gate again. He tried patting, he tried speaking, he tried spurring. But the horse refused with all the obstinacy of which brute nature is capable. In little, as in big things, The Swell would try once, but never more often. He was like some men and many women—easily disheartened by failure, and let failure conquer *him*, instead of *he* conquering failure.

This delay proved most vexatious. For when you have been immersed in a brook, on a cold November afternoon, every minute appears of consequence. Your whole soul hankers after warmth, and a dry change of clothes. There was nothing for it, however, but to get off. Bob did so, and throwing the reins over his bridle arm, proceeded to ascertain why this particular gate was unlike all other gates, and refused to allow itself to be opened.

But heaving, pushing, lifting—all proved useless. At the end of five minutes he was in despair. Finally he put his shoulder to

the refractory bars, and tried to break them down by main force. He was a strong, athletic young fellow, six feet in height, and broad of chest, with muscles developed by the healthy open-air life he had led. But he was just as powerless against those strong white timbers as a child of six. He could not even bend them, although he put forth all his strength, and his face turned scarlet with exertion.

A heavy sigh escaped from him. It acknowledged his defeat. Totally disconcerted, he told himself that he must retrace his footsteps and seek some fresh means of entering the road. He glanced at the fence which ran on either side of the gate. But it was perfectly unjumpable, and even had it been otherwise, he doubted very much whether The Swell, in his present state, could have made an effort. He was at his wits' end.

And then, all at once, hope surged up into his heart.

He heard a noise, the clatter of hoofs approaching on the hard macadam. Thank goodness! help was at hand. The people of the country would surely understand how these mysterious gates opened. And even if the worst came to the worst, with the aid of another good, strong man, he felt confident that he could break the wretched thing down. It would be easy to pay for the damages afterwards, but home, sweet home, was the chief consideration just at present.

Bob's disappointment was therefore extreme, when a sharp turn in the road revealed a young lady, riding a smart dun cob, about fourteen hands high.

Their eyes met, and she seemed immediately to guess the cause of his distress. She blushed a little, hesitated for a moment, and then pulled the dun up to a stand.

"I see you are in difficulties," she said, in a voice whose frank, straightforward tones impressed him favourably. "Will you allow me to help you?"

In his amazement at this slim, slip of a girl imagining that she could open a gate which had defied all his own energies, Bob did a very rude thing.

He made no answer, but simply stood still, and stared at the fair Samaritan who thus kindly volunteered to assist him.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

AN evening private view of Monticelli's pictures was held by Messrs. Dowdeswell at their fine new galleries in Bond Street. This function was even a greater success than that at Suffolk Street last month. The galleries were very tastefully draped with bronze-coloured cloth, and the lights were so skilfully softened by means of coloured shades and a tent-like canopy suspended beneath the ceiling in the large room, that the guests looked their best, and, seeing that pleasant fact reflected in the faces of others, were consequently in the precise mood to please and be pleased. There was much difference of opinion about the French artist's pictures—though of Italian patronymic, he was born at Marseilles, and brought up in France—but no one permitted either advocacy or unbelief to lead them into any heat of discussion. Among the best known of the people present was Lady Colin Campbell, who looked magnificently handsome in a well-made dress of peach-coloured silk. This lady is evidently of Tennyson's opinion, expressed in "Enid":

"Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old."

Her dresses are always not only in the newest style, but excellently adapted to the occasions when they are worn. Every one seemed to have donned the most becoming gown in their wardrobe for this private view with a sort of prescience that the picture-decked walls would form a good background, and that excursions to the tea room would afford opportunities for the display of prettily draped skirts. The Oriental Association served tea, coffee and other light refreshments in their own inimitable style upstairs among the beautiful engravings and etchings, and their daintily-laid and otherwise attractive buffet was tended by a group of pretty girls in scarlet dresses, which, had they only been supplemented by scarlet caps and aprons to match, would have made an enchanting bit of colour among the endless harmonies in black and white that hung on the walls. The delicious tea they dispensed appeared to have the same effect on repartee and other forms of flow of soul as is generally attributed to champagne and kindred wines, for some of the most brilliant conversation of the

evening was heard in their vicinity. Here Mr. Whistler almost gyrated in restless vivacity, knowing everybody, and known of all; his cordial hand-clasp and hearty greeting endangered more than one lovely gown by threatening to cause its wearer to spill her tea. An artistic black and white dress was pronounced one of the successes of the evening. Mrs. Oscar Wilde looked really beautiful in a charming bit of millinery evoked from several yards of silk printed in green upon gold, and faced with green here and there. The authoress of "Tit for Tat" looked even more picturesque than usual, with her pretty grey hair entwined with links of glittering steel. Miss Fortescue's delicately charming face emerged with excellent effect from a soft treble melody of primrose silk set to a slender bass of brown velvet. Two pretty sisters in flowered brocades attracted quite as many glances as the pictures. There was some good music—not too much; and Miss Alma Murray recited "The Vanished City" with all her usual dramatic perception and exquisite clear purity of enunciation.

Why are not the School Board children taught elocution instead of some of the useless and even injurious kinds of learning forced upon them? Very few persons speak clearly and distinctly even among the educated classes, while those in lower grades hardly ever do so. Much irritation and annoyance is experienced owing to this cause, and probably ratepayers would grudge their money less if it were applied in teaching the pupils how to use their mother-tongue.

Some London hostesses are beginning to follow the Parisian fashion, and receive their friends in the evening. This is, for many reasons, a pleasant innovation. Afternoon calls are responsible for quite half the colds, chills and coughs that afflict the mothers and daughters who make them. The warm furs are not wholly thrown aside, as they ought to be and as the hostess generally suggests that they should be, with the consequence that the wearers of them become over-heated, and when they leave, contract a perceptible chill when they get outside in the cold air. At evening receptions the warm coverings are all doffed, and dinner-gowns, tea-gowns and girlish evening dresses are revealed in all their daintiness. Another advantage appertaining to evening calls is that the masculine element is not in the minority, as it so painfully is in the afternoon, when men are unwilling to sacrifice an hour or two from their business or other avocations. Without any intention of flattering the already quite sufficiently perceptible *amour propre* of our male relatives and friends, I may admit that it is generally agreed among women that things are considerably pleasanter when men are present in any adequate proportion to the number of women. This can be better compassed in the evening than earlier in the day, though there are wives who complain that their husbands can never be tempted out of comfortable post-prandial siestas by the fireside in

favourite and too luxurious arm-chairs, either to call on friends or to go to the play.

"Partners," at the Haymarket, is one of the plays to see just now. It goes much better than it did on the first night, and being full of human interest, it is sure to draw. Mr. Beerbohm Tree's impersonation of Borgfeldt has crowned his many creations with one which surpasses all results of previous effort. No lover of the drama should fail to see him in this part. Mr. Tree will make, nay, is making himself an enduring name, and some day, when he is not too young to be acknowledged as a great actor, those who have missed seeing him in one of the parts by which he has so swiftly run up the ladder of fame, will regret a lost opportunity.

Happy children now fill Covent Garden and Drury Lane to see the pantomimes, and throng to Hengler's Circus to see "Red Riding Hood," beloved of our childhood. Animals always delight children, and here there are horses and ponies which possess every quality of attractiveness that can pertain to the equine race. It is a pleasant experience to take a child there and glance round the circle at the happy little faces, and hear the merry laughter of these small patrons of what may be called the equestrian drama.

Good news comes from Paris this month. The men-milliners of that city have at last resolved to make a virtue of necessity and yield to the persistence of Englishwomen in opposing the hideous *tournure*, otherwise, dress-improver. In trained dresses it is to be absolutely dispensed with, though it is to be maintained in a modified form for walking costumes. It is pleasant to see the thin end of the wedge inserted, proving, as it does, that common sense will influence even fashion itself, if only exercised with force and discretion.

Cloth dresses and bonnets are the only particular specialty of this season's dresses; nor need we hope for much news on this engrossing subject for some weeks to come.

LONDON SOCIETY.

MARCH, 1888.

THE FATAL THREE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL," "LIKE AND UNLIKE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER V.

WITHOUT THE WOLF.

"FATHER," said Lola, "there are ever so many people in the village ill with fever. Isn't it sad?"

Mr. and Mrs. Greswold, of Enderby Manor, had been submitting to a fortnight's dissipation in London, and this was their first Sunday at home after that interval. They had returned late on the previous night, and house and gardens had all the sweetness and freshness of a scene to which one is restored after absence. They had spent the summer morning in the little village church with their daughter; and now they were enjoying the leisure interval between church and luncheon.

George Greswold sat in a lounging chair under a cedar within twenty yards of the dining-room windows, and Lola was hanging about him as he had read the *Athenæum*, caressing him with little touches of light hands upon his hair or his coat collar, adoring him with all her might after the agony of severance.

She was his only child, and the love between them was passing the love of the father and daughter of every-day life. It was an almost romantic attachment.

Like most only daughters Lola was precocious, in advance of her years, in thoughtfulness and emotion, though perhaps a little behind the average girl of twelve in the severities of feminine education. She had been her mother's chief companion from babyhood, the confidante of all that mother's thoughts and fancies, which were innocent as those of childhood itself. She had read much more than most girls of her age, and had been made familiar with poets whose names are only known to the school girl in a history

of literature. She knew a good deal about the best books in European literature; but most of all she knew the hearts and minds of her father and mother, their loves and likings, their joys and sorrows. She had never been shut out from their confidence; she had never been told to go and play when they wanted to talk to each other. She had sat with them, and walked, and ridden and driven with them ever since she was old enough to dispense with her nurse's arms. She had lived her young life with them, and had been a part of their lives.

George Greswold looked up from his *Athenæum* in quick alarm.

"Fever!" he exclaimed, "fever at Enderby!"

"Strange, isn't it, father? Everybody is wondering about it. Enderby has always been such a healthy village, and you have taken such pains to make it so."

"Yes, love, I have done my best. I am a landlord for pleasure and not for gain, as you and mother know."

"And what seems strangest and worst of all," continued Lola, "is that this dreadful fever has broken out among the people you and mother and I are fondest of—our old friends and pensioners—and the children we know most about. It seems so hard that those you and mother have helped the most should be the first to be ill in all the village."

"Yes, love, that seems very hard for my tender-hearted darling."

Her father looked up at her fondly as she stood behind his chair, her white arm leaning upon his shoulder. The summer was in its zenith; it was strawberry time, rose time, haymaking time, the season of nightingales, and meadow-sweet, and tall Mary lilies, and all those lovely things that cluster in the very core of summer's great warm heart. Lola was all in white, a loose muslin frock, straight from shoulder to instep. Her thick gold hair fell straight as her frock, below her ungirdled waist, and in her white and gold she had the look of an angel in an early Italian picture. Her eyes were as blue as that cloudless sky of midsummer which took a deeper azure behind the black-green branches of the cedar.

"My pet, I take it this fever is some slight summer malady. Cottagers are such ravens. They always make the worst of an illness."

"Oh, but they really have been very bad. Mary Martin has had the fever, but she is getting better. And there's Johnny Giles, you know what a strong boy *he* is. He's very bad, poor little chap; so delirious, and I do feel so sorry for his poor mother. And young Mrs. Peter has it, and two of her children."

"It must be contagious," cried Greswold, seizing his daughter's round white arm with an agitated movement. "You have not been to see any of them, have you, Lola?" he asked, looking at her with unspeakable anxiety.

"No, Mrs. Bell wouldn't let me go to see any of them; but of course I have taken them things every day, wine, and beef-tea, and jelly, and everything we could think of, and they have had as much milk as they liked."

"You should not have gone yourself with the things, darling. You should have sent them."

"That would seem so unkind, as if one hardly cared; and Puck with nothing to do all the time but to draw me about. It was no trouble to go myself. I did not even go inside the cottages. Bell said I mustn't."

"Bell was right. Well, I suppose there is no harm done if you didn't go into any of the cottages; and it was very sweet of you to take the things yourself, like Red-ridinghood, only without the wolf. There goes the gong. I hope you are hungry."

"Not very. The weather is too warm for eating anything but strawberries."

He looked at her anxiously again, ready to take alarm at a word.

"Yes, it is too warm in this south-western country," he said nervously. "We'll go to Scotland next week."

"So soon?"

"Why not a little sooner than usual, for once in a way?"

"I shall be sorry to go away while the people are ill," she said gravely.

George Greswold forgot that the gong had sounded. He sat, leaning forward, in a despondent attitude. The very mention of sickness in the land had unhinged him. This child was so dear to him, his one ewe lamb. He had done all that forethought, sense, and science could do to make the village which lay at his doors the very shrine of health and purity. Famous sanitarians had been entertained at the Manor, and had held counsel with Mr. Greswold upon the progress of sanitation, and its latest developments. They had wondered with him over the blindness and ignorance of our forefathers. They had instructed him how to drain his house, and how to ventilate and purify his cottages. They had assured him that, so far as humanity can ever hope to attain, perfection had been achieved in Enderby village and Enderby Manor House.

And now his idolized daughter hung over his chair and told him that there was fever raging in the land, his land; the land which he loved as if it were a living thing, and on which he had lavished care and money ever since he had owned it. Other men might consider their ancestral estates as something to be lived upon; George Greswold thought of his forefathers' house and lands as something to be lived for. His cottages were model cottages, and he was known far and wide as a model landlord.

"George, are you quite forgetting luncheon?" asked a voice from one of the open windows, and he looked up to see a

beautiful face looking out at him, framed in hair of Lola's colour.

"My dear Mildred, come here for a moment," he said, and his wife went to him, smiling still, but with a shade of uneasiness in her face.

"Go in, pet, we'll follow you directly," he said to his daughter, and then he rose slowly, with an air of being almost broken down by a great trouble, and put his arm through his wife's arm and led her along the velvet turf beyond the cedar.

"Mildred, have you heard of this fever?"

"Yes, Louisa told me this morning when she was doing my hair. It seems to be rather bad; but there cannot be any danger, surely, after all you have done to make the cottages perfect in every way?"

"One cannot tell. There may be a germ of evil brought from somewhere else. I am sorry Lola has been among the people."

"Oh, but she has not been inside any of the cottages. Bell took care to prevent that."

"Bell was wise, but she might have done better still. She should have telegraphed to us. Lola must not go about any more. You will see to that, won't you, dearest? Before the end of the week I will take you both to Scotland."

"Do you really suppose there can be danger?" she asked, growing very pale.

"No, no, I don't apprehend danger. Only it is better to be over cautious than over bold. We cannot be too careful of our treasure."

"No, no, indeed," answered the mother, with a piteous look.

"Mother," called Lola from the window, "are you ever coming? Pomfret will be late for church."

Pomfret was the butler, whose convenience had to be studied a little upon Sundays. The servants dined while the family were at luncheon, and almost all the establishment went to afternoon service, leaving a footman and an under-housemaid in sole possession of the great, grave old manor house, where the silence had a solemnity as in some monastic chapel. Lola was anxious that luncheon should begin, and Pomfret be dismissed to eat his dinner.

This child of twelve had more than a woman's forethought. She spent her life in thinking about other people; but of all those whom she loved, and for whom she cared, her father was first and chief. For him her love was akin to worship.

She watched his face anxiously now, as she took her seat at his right hand, and was silent until Pomfret had served the soup and retired, leaving all the rest of the luncheon on the table, and the wine on a dumb-waiter by his master's side.

There was always a cold luncheon on Sundays, and the evening

meal was also cold, a compromise between dinner and supper, served at nine o'clock, by which time the servants had gratified their various tastes for church or chapel, and had enjoyed an evening walk. There was no parsonage in England where the day of rest was held in more reverence than it was at Enderby Manor House.

Mr. Greswold was no bigot, his religion in no wise savoured of the over-good school; but he was a man of deep religious convictions; and he had been brought up to honour Sunday as a day set apart.

The Sunday parties and Sunday amusements of fashionable London were an abomination to him, though he was far too liberal-minded to wish to shut museums and picture galleries against the people.

"Father," said Lola, when they were alone, "I'm afraid you had your bad dream last night."

Greswold looked at her curiously.

"No, love, my dreams were colourless, and have left not even a remembrance."

"And yet you look sorrowful, just as you always look after your bad dream."

"Your father is anxious about the cottagers who are ill, dearest," said Mrs. Greswold. "That is all."

"But you must not be unhappy about them, father, dear. You don't think that any of them will die, do you?" asked Lola, drawing very near him, and looking up at him with awe-stricken eyes.

"Indeed; my love, I hope not. They shall not die, if care can save them. I will walk round the village with Porter this afternoon and find out all about the trouble. If there is anything that he cannot understand, we'll have Pond over from Southampton, or a physician from London if necessary. My people shall not be neglected."

"May I go with you this afternoon, father?"

"No, dearest, neither you nor mother must leave the grounds till we go away. I will have no needless risks run by my dear ones."

Neither mother nor daughter disputed his will upon this point. He was the sole arbiter of their lives. It seemed almost as if they lived only to please him. Both would have liked to go with him; both thought him over cautious; yet neither attempted to argue the point. Happy household in which there are no arguments upon domestic trifles, no bickerings about the infinitesimals of life.

Enderby Manor was one of those ideal homes which adorn the face of England, and sustain its reputation as the native soil of domestic virtues, the country in which good wives and good mothers are indigenous.

There are many such ideal homes in the land, as to outward

aspect, seen from the high road, across park or pasture, shrubbery or flower garden; but only a few of these sustain the idea upon intimate knowledge of the interior.

Here, within as well as without, the atmosphere was peace. Those velvet lawns and brilliant flower beds were not more perfect than the love between husband and wife, child and parents. No cloud had ever shadowed that serene heaven of domestic peace. George Greswold had married at thirty a girl of eighteen who adored him; and those two had lived for each other and for their only child ever since. All outside the narrow circle of family love counted only as the margin or the framework of life. All the deepest and sweetest elements of life were within the veil. Mildred Greswold could not conceive a fashionable woman's existence, a life given up to frivolous occupations and futile excitements, a life of empty pleasure faintly flavoured with art, literature, science, philanthropy, and politics, and fancying itself eminently useful and eminently progressive. She had seen such a career in her childhood, and had wondered that any reasoning creature could so live. She had turned her back upon the modish world when she married George Greswold, and had surrendered most of the delights of society to lead quiet days in her husband's ancestral home, loving that old house for his sake as he loved it for the sake of the dead.

They were not in outer darkness, however, as to the movement of the world. They spent a week or a fortnight at Limmer's occasionally, when the fancy moved them. They saw all the pictures worth seeing, heard a good deal of the best music, mixed just enough in society to distinguish gold from tinsel, and to make a happy choice of friends.

They occasionally treated themselves to a week in Paris, and their autumn holidays were generally spent in a shooting-box twenty miles beyond Inverness. They came back to the Manor for Christmas, and the New Year generally began with a house party which lasted with variations until the hunting was all over, and the leaves were thick in the neighbouring forest. No lives could have been happier, or fuller of interest; but the interest all centred in home. Farmers and cottagers on the estate were cared for as a part of home, and the estate itself was loved almost as a living thing by husband and wife and the fair child who had been born to them in the old-fashioned house.

The grave red-brick manor house had been built when William the Third was King, and there were some Dutch innovations in the old English architecture; notably a turret, or pavilion, at the end of each wing, and a long bowling-green on the western side of the garden. The walls had that deep, glowing red which is only seen in old brickwork, and the black glazed tiles upon the hopper roof glittered in the sunlight with the prismatic hues of antique Rhodian glass. The chief characteristic of the interior was the

oak panelling, which clothed the rooms and corridors as in a garment of sober brown, and would have been suggestive of gloom but for the pictures and porcelain which brightened all the rooms, and the rich colouring of brocaded curtains and tapestry portières. The chief charm of the house was the aspect of home-life, the books and musical instruments, the art treasures, and flowers, and domestic trifles to be seen everywhere; the air which every room and every nook and corner had of being lived in by home-loving and home-keeping people.

The pavilion at the end of the south-west wing was Lola's special domain, that and the room communicating with it. That pretty sitting-room, with dwarf book shelves, water-colour pictures, and Wedgwood china was never called a school-room. It was Lola's study.

"There shall be no suggestion of school in our home," said George Greswold.

It was he who chose his daughter's masters, and it was often he who attended during the lesson, listening intently to the progress of the work, and as keenly interested in the pupil's progress as the pupil herself. Latin he himself taught her, and she already knew by heart those noblest of Horace's odes which are fittest for young lips. Their philosophy saddened her a little.

"Is life always changing?" she asked her father. "Must one never venture to be quite happy?"

The Latin poet's pervading idea of mutability, inevitable death, and inevitable change, impressed her with a flavour of sadness, child as she was.

"My dearest, had Horace been a Christian as you are, and had he lived for others, as you do, he would not have been afraid to call himself happy," answered George Greswold. "He was a Pagan, and he put on the armour of philosophy, for want of the armour of faith."

These lessons in the classics, taking a dead language not as a dry study of grammar and dictionary, but as the gate to new worlds of poetry and philosophy, had been Lola's delight. She was in no wise unpleasantly precocious; but she was far in advance of the conventional school-room child, trained into characterless uniformity by a superior governess. Lola had never been under governess rule. Her life at the Manor had been as free as that of the butterflies. There was only Bell to lecture her—white-haired Mrs. Bell, thin and spare, straight as an arrow, at seventy-four years of age, the embodiment of servants'-hall gentility in her black silk afternoon gown, and neat cambric cap; Bell, who looked after Lola's health, and Lola's rooms, and was for ever tidying drawers and tables, and lecturing upon the degeneracy of girlhood. It was her boast to have nursed Lola's grandmother, as well as Lola's mother, which seemed going back to the remoteness of the dark ages.

Enderby Manor was three miles from Romsey, and within riding or driving distance of the New Forest and of Salisbury Cathedral. It lay in the heart of a pastoral district watered by the Test, and was altogether one of the most enjoyable estates in that part of the country.

Before luncheon was finished a messenger was on his way to the village to summon Mr. Porter, more commonly Dr. Porter, the parish and everybody's doctor, an elderly man of burly figure, close-cropped grey hair, and yeoman-like bearing—a man born on the soil, whose father and grandfather and great-grandfather had cured or killed the inhabitants of Enderby parish from time immemorial. Judging from the tombstones in the pretty old churchyard, they must have cured more than they killed, for those crumbling moss-grown stones bore the record of patriarchal lives, and the Union near Enderby was a museum of incipient centenarians.

Mr. Porter came into the grave old library at the Manor looking more serious than his wont, perhaps in sympathy with George Greswold's anxious face, turned towards the door as the footman opened it.

"Well, Porter, what does it all mean, this fever?" asked Greswold abruptly.

Mr. Porter had a manner of discussing a case which was all his own. He always appealed to his patient with a professional air, as if consulting another medical authority, and a higher one than himself. It was flattering, perhaps, but not always satisfactory.

"Well, you see, there's the high temperature—104 in some cases—and there's the throat, and there's headache. What do you say?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Porter, you must know whether it is a malignant, infectious fever or not. If you don't know we'll send to Southampton for Pond."

"Of course you can have him if you like. I judge more by temperature than anything—the thermometer is a safer guide than the pulse, as you know. I took their temperatures this morning before I went to church—only one case in which there was improvement—all the others decidedly worse—very strongly developed cases of malignant fever—typhus or typhoid—which, as you know, by Jenner's differentiation of the two forms——"

"For God's sake, man, don't talk to me as if I were a doctor, and had your ghoulish relish of disease. If you have the slightest doubt as to treatment send for Pond."

He took a sheaf of telegraph forms from the stand in front of him, and began to write his message while he was talking. He had made up his mind that Dr. Pond must come to see these humble sufferers, and to investigate the cause of evil. He had taken such pains to create a healthy settlement, had spared no expense; and for fifteen years, from the hour of his succession

until now, all had gone well with him. And now there was fever in the land, fever in the air breathed by those two beloved ones, daughter and wife.

"I have been so happy; my life has been cloudless, save for one dark memory," he said to himself, covering his face with his hands as he leaned with his elbows on the table, while Mr. Porter expatiated upon the cases in the village, and on fever in general.

"I have tested the water in all the wells—perfectly pure. There can be nothing amiss with the milk, for all my patients are getting it from your own dairy. The drainage is perfection—yet here we have an outbreak of fever, which looks remarkably like typhoid."

"Why not say at once that it is typhoid?"

"The symptoms all point that way."

"You say there can be nothing amiss with the milk. You have not analyzed it, I suppose?"

"Why should I? Out of your own dairy, where everything is managed in the very best way—the perfection of cleanliness in every detail."

"You ought to have analyzed the milk all the same," said Greswold thoughtfully. "The strength of a chain is its weakest link. There may be some weak link here, though we cannot put our fingers upon it—yet. Are there many cases?"

"Let me see. There's Johnny Giles, and Mrs. Peter and her children, and Janet Dawson, and there's Andrew Rogers, and there's Mary Rainbow," began Mr. Porter, counting on his fingers as he went on, until the list of sufferers came to eleven. "Mostly youngsters," he said in conclusion.

"They ought to have been isolated," said Greswold. "I will get out plans for an infirmary to-morrow. There is the willow field, on the other side of the village, a ridge of high ground sloping towards the parish drain, with a southern exposure, a capital site for a hospital. It is dreadful to think of fever-poison spreading from eleven different cottages. Which was the first case?"

"Little Rainbow."

"That fair-haired child whom I used to see from my dressing-room window every morning as she went away from the dairy, tottering under a pitcher of milk? Poor little Polly! She was a favourite with us all. Is she very ill?"

"Yes, I think hers is about the best case," answered the doctor unctuously; "the others are a little vague—but there's no doubt about *her*, all the symptoms strongly marked—a very clear case."

"Is there any danger of a fatal termination?"

"I'm afraid there is."

"Poor little Polly—poor pretty little girl. I used to know it was seven o'clock when I saw that bright little flaxen head flit by the yew hedge yonder. Polly was as good a timekeeper as any

clock in the village. And you think she may die? You have not told Lola, I hope."

"No, I have not let out anything about danger. Lola is only too anxious already."

"I will put the infirmary in hand to-morrow; and I will take Mrs. Greswold and Lola to Scotland on Tuesday."

"Upon my word it will be a very good thing to get them away. These fever cases are so mysterious. There's no knowing what shape infection may take. I have the strongest belief in your system of drainage——"

"Nothing is perfect," said Mr. Greswold impatiently. "The science of sanitation is still in its infancy. I sometimes think we have not advanced very far from the knowledge of our ancestors, whose homes were desolated by the Black Death. However, don't let us talk, Porter. Let us act if we can. Come and look at the dairy."

"You don't apprehend evil there?"

"There are three sources of typhoid poison—drainage—water—milk. You say the drains and the water are good, and that the milk comes from my own dairy. If you are right as to the first and second—the third must be wrong, no matter whose dairy it may come from."

He took up his hat, and went out of the house with the doctor. Gardens and shrubberies stretched before them in all their beauty of summer verdure, gardens and shrubberies which had been the delight and pride of many generations of Greswolds, but loved more dearly by none than by George Greswold and Mildred, his wife. In Mildred's mind the old family house was a part of her husband's existence, an attribute rather than a mere possession. Every tree and every shrub were sacred. These, his mother's own hands had cropped and tended; those, grandfathers and great-grandfathers and *arrière* great-grandfathers had planted in epochs that distance has made romantic.

On the right of the hall door a broad gravel path led in a serpentine sweep towards the stables, a long, low building spread over a considerable area, and hidden by shrubberies. The dairy was a little further off approached by a winding walk through thickets of laurel and arbutus. It had been originally a chapel, and was used as a receptacle for all manner of out-of-door lumber when Mildred came to the Manor. She had converted the old stone building into a model dairy, with outside gallery and staircase of solid woodwork, and with a Swiss roof. Other buildings had been added to this one large barn-shaped edifice. There were low cowhouses, and tall pigeon houses, and a picturesque variety of gables and elevations which was delightful to the eye, seen on a summer afternoon such as this June Sunday, amidst the odour of clove carnations, and old English roses, and the cooing of doves.

Mrs. Greswold's Channel Island cows were her delight, creatures

with coats of tawny or grey, black noses, and wistful brown eyes. Scarcely a day passed on which she did not waste an hour or so in the cowhouses or in the meadows caressing these favourites. Each cow had her name, painted in blue and white above her stall, and the chief, or duchess of the herd, was very severe in the maintenance of cowhouse precedence, and knew how to resent the insolence of a new comer who should presume to cross the threshold in advance of her.

The dairy itself had a solemn and shadowy air, like a shrine, and was as pretty as the dairy at Frogmore. The walls were lined with Minton tiles, the shallow milk pans were of Doulton pottery, and quaintly-shaped pitchers of bright colours were ranged on china brackets along the walls. The windows were latticed with panes of ruby, rose, or amethyst here and there, as if put in haphazard among the old bottle-green glass.

The chief dairy woman lived at an old-fashioned cottage on the premises with her husband, the cowkeeper; and their garden, which lay at the back of the cowhouses and dairy, was the very ideal of an old English garden, in which flowers and fruit strive for the mastery. In a corner of this garden, close to the outer offices of the cottage, among rows of peas, and summer cabbages, and great overgrown lavender bushes and moss roses, stood the old well, with its crumbling brick border and ancient spindle, a well that had been dug when the old manor house was new.

There were other water arrangements for Mrs. Greswold's dairy; a new artesian well, on a hill a quarter of a mile from the kitchen garden, a well that went deep down into the chalk, was famous for the purity of its water. All the drinking water of the house was supplied from this well, and the water was laid on in iron pipes to dairy and cowhouses. All the vessels used for milk or cream were washed in this water, at least such were Mr. Greswold's strict orders; orders supposed to be carried out under the supervision of his bailiff and housekeeper.

Mr. Porter looked at a reeking heap of stable manure that sprawled within twenty feet of the old well, with suspicion in his eye; and from the manure heap he looked at the back premises of the old cob-walled cottage.

"I'm afraid there may have been soakage from that manure heap into the well," he said, "and if your dairy vessels are washed in that water —"

"But they never are," answered Greswold; "that water is only used for the garden—eh, Mrs. Wadman?"

The dairywoman was standing on the threshold of her neat little kitchen, courtesying to her master, resplendent in her Sunday gown of bright blue merino, and her Sunday brooch, containing her husband's photograph, coloured out of knowledge.

"No, of course not, sir; leastways never except there was something wrong with the pipes from the artesian."

"Something wrong; when was that? I never heard of anything wrong."

"Well, sir, my husband didn't want to be troublesome and Mr. Thomas he gave the order for the men from Romsey, that was on the Saturday after working hours. And they was to come as it might be on the Monday morning, and they never come near, and Mr. Thomas he wrote and wrote, and my husband he says, it ain't no use writing, and he takes the pony and rides over to Romsey in his overtime, and he complains about the men not coming, and they tells him there's a big job on at Broadlands and not a plumber to be had for love or money; but the pipes is all right now, sir."

"Now? Since when have they been in working order?"

"Since yesterday, sir. Mr. Thomas was determined he'd have everything right before you came back."

"And how long have you been using that water," pointing to the well, with its moss-grown brickwork and flaunting margin of yellow stonecrop, "for dairy purposes?"

"Well, you see, sir, we was obliged to use water of some kind; and there ain't purer or better water than that for twenty mile round. I always use it for my kettle every time I make tea for me or my master, and never found no harm from it in the last fifteen years."

"How long have you used it for the dairy?" repeated Greswold angrily; "can't you gave a straight answer, woman?"

Mrs. Wadman could not, had never achieved a direct reply to a plain question within the memory of man.

"The men was to have come on the Monday morning, first thing," she said, "and they didn't come till the Tuesday week after that, and then they was that slow —"

George Greswold walked up and down the garden path raging.

"She won't answer," he cried. "Was it a week—a fortnight—three weeks ago that you began to use that water for your dairy?" he asked sternly, and gradually he and the doctor extorted from her that the garden well had been in use for the dairy nearly three weeks up to yesterday.

"Then that is enough to account for everything," said Dr. Porter. "First there is filtration of manure through a gravelly soil—inevitable—and next there is something worse. She had her sister here from Salisbury—six weeks ago—down with typhoid fever three days after she came—brought it from Salisbury."

"Yes, yes—I remember," said Greswold, "you told me there was no danger of infection."

"There need have been none. I made her use all precautions possible in an old-fashioned cottage—but however careful she might be, there would be always the risk of a well—close at hand like that one—getting tainted. I asked her if she ever used that water for anything but the garden—and she said no—the artesian

well supplied every want—and now she talks about her kettle—and tells us coolly that she has been using that polluted water for the last three weeks—and poisoning a whole village.”

“Me poisoning the village! Oh, Dr. Porter, how can you say such a cruel thing? Me that wouldn’t hurt a fly if I knew it.”

“Perhaps not Mrs. Wadman; but I’m afraid you’ve hurt a good many of your neighbours without knowing it.”

George Greswold stood in the pathway silent, and deadly pale. He had been so happy for the last thirteen years of his life—a sky without a cloud—and now in a moment the clouds were closing round him, and again all might be darkness, as it had been once before in his life. Calamity for which he felt himself unaccountable had come upon him before—swift as an arrow from the bow—and now again he stood helpless, smitten by the hand of fate.

He thought of the little village child, with her pretty, guileless face, looking up at his window as she tripped by with her pitcher. And his dole of milk had been fatal to the simple souls who had looked up to him as a Providence! He had taken such pains that all should be sweet and wholesome in his people’s cottages, he had spent money like water, and had lectured them and taught them; and lo! from his own luxurious home the evil had gone forth. Careless servants, hushing up a difficulty, loath to approach him with plain facts, lest they should be considered troublesome, had brought this evil, had spread disease and death in the land.

And his own and only child, the delight of his life, the apple of his eye—that tainted milk had been served at her table. Amidst all that grace of porcelain and flowers the poison had lurked, as at the cottagers’ board. What if she, too, should suffer?

He meant to take her away in a day or two—now—now when the cause of evil was at work no longer. The thought that it might be too late, that the germ of poison might lurk in the heart of that fair flower filled him with despair.

Mrs. Wadman had run into her cottage shedding indignant tears at Dr. Porter’s cruelty. She came out again, with a triumphant air, carrying a tumbler of water.

“Just look at it, sir,” she said; “look how bright and clear it is. There never was better water.”

“My good woman, in this case brightness and clearness mean corruption,” said the doctor. “If you’ll give me a pint of that water in a bottle, I’ll take it home with me and test it before I sleep to-night.”

CHAPTER VI.

“AH! PITY! THE LILY IS WITHERED.”

GEORGE GRESWOLD left the dairy garden like a man stricken to death. He felt as if the hand of fate were on him. It was not

his fault that this evil had come upon him, that these poor people whom he had tried to help suffered by his bounty, were perhaps to die for it. He had done all that human foresight could do, but the blind folly of his servants had stultified his wisdom. Nothing in a London slum could have been worse than this evil which had come about in a gentleman's ornamental dairy, upon premises where money had been lavished to secure the perfection of scientific sanitation.

Mr. Porter murmured some hopeful remark as they went back to the house.

"Don't talk about it, Porter," Greswold answered impatiently. "Nothing could be worse—nothing. Do all you can for these poor people—your uttermost, mind, your uttermost. Spare neither time nor money. Save them if you can."

"You may be assured I shall do my best. There are only three or four very bad cases."

"Three or four! My God! how horrible. Three or four people murdered by the idiocy of my servants."

"Joe Stanning—not much chance for him, I'm afraid—and Polly Rainbow."

"Polly—poor pretty little Polly! Oh, Porter, you *must* save her. You must perform a miracle, man. That is what genius means in a doctor. The man of genius does something that all other doctors have pronounced impossible. You will have Pond over to-morrow, no doubt. He will help you."

"If she lives till to-morrow. I'm afraid it's a question of a few hours."

George Greswold groaned aloud.

"And my daughter has been drinking the same tainted milk. Will she be stricken, do you think?" he asked with an awful calmness.

"God forbid. Lola has such a fine constitution, and the surrounding circumstances are all different. I'll go and have a look at my patients, and come back to you late in the evening with the last news."

They parted by a little gate at the corner of a thick yew hedge, which admitted Mr. Greswold into his wife's flower garden, a very old garden which had been the care and delight of many generations; a large square garden, with broad flower beds on each side, a stone sundial in the centre of a grass plat, and a buttressed wall at the end, a massive old wall of vermilion brickwork, honey-combed by the decay of centuries, against which a double rank of hollyhocks made a parti-coloured screen, while flaunting dragon's mouth and yellow stonecrop made a frame of colour on the top.

There was an old stone summer house in each angle of that end wall, temples open to the sun and air, and raised upon three marble steps, stained with the discolouration of ages.

Charming as these antique retreats were to muse or read in, Mildred Greswold preferred taking tea on the lawn in the shadow of a mulberry tree that looked old enough to have been coeval with Shakespeare's tree in the garden of New Place. She was sitting in a low garden chair with a Japanese tea table at her side, and a volume of Robertson's sermons on her lap.

It was a rule of life at Enderby Manor that only books of pious tendency should be read on Sundays. The religious library was varied and well chosen. Nobody ever found the books dull or the day too long. The dedication of that one day in seven to godliness and good works had never been an oppression to Mildred Greswold.

She remembered her mother's Sundays, days of hasty church, and slow, elaborate dressing for afternoon or evening gaieties—days of church parade, and much talk about other people's gowns and other people's conduct—days of gadding about and running from place to place—Sunday luncheons—Sunday musical parties—Sunday expeditions up the river—Sunday in the studios—Sunday at Richmond or Greenwich. Mrs. Greswold remembered the fussy emptiness of that fashionable Sunday, and preferred sermons and tranquil solitude in the manor gardens.

Solitude meant a trinity of domestic love. Husband, wife, and daughter spent their Sundays together. Those were blessed days for the wife and daughter, since there were no business engagements, no Quarter Sessions, or interviews with the bailiff, or letter-writing, to rob them of the society they both loved best in the world. George Greswold devoted his Sundays entirely to his Creator and his home.

"Where is Lola?" he asked, surprised to find his wife alone at this hour.

"She has a slight headache, and I persuaded her to lie down for an hour or so."

The father's face blanched. A word was enough in his overwrought condition.

"Porter must see her," he said, "and I have just let him leave me. I'll send some one after him."

"My dear George, it is nothing; only one of her usual headaches."

"You are sure she was not feverish?"

"I think not—it never occurred to me. She has often complained of headache since she began to grow so fast."

"Yes, she has shot up like a tall white lily—my lily," murmured the father tenderly.

He sank into a chair, feeling helpless, hopeless almost under that overpowering sense of fatality—of undeserved evil.

"Dear George, you look so ill this afternoon," said his wife with tender anxiety, laying her hand on his shoulder and looking earnestly at him as he sat there in a downcast attitude, his arms

hanging loosely, his eyes bent upon the ground. "I am afraid the heat has overcome you."

"Yes, it has been very hot. Do me a favour, Mildred. Go into the house, and send somebody to find Porter. He was going the round of the cottages where there are sick people. He can easily be found. I want him to see Lola—at once."

"I'll send after him, George; but indeed I don't apprehend any need for a doctor. Lola is so strong. Her headaches pass like summer clouds. Oh, George, you don't think that *she* is going to have fever, like the cottagers?" cried Mrs. Greswold, full of a sudden terror.

"No, no; of course not. No, Mildred. Why—why should she have the fever? But Porter might as well see her—at once—at once. I hate delay in such cases."

His wife hurried away without a word. He had imbued her with all his own fears.

He sat in the garden, just as she had left him, motionless, benumbed with sorrow. There might, indeed, be no ground for this chilling fear—others might die and his beloved might still go unscathed. But she had been subjected to the same poison, and at any moment the same symptoms might show themselves. For the next week or ten days he must be haunted by a hideous spectre. He would make haste to get his dearest one away to the strong fresh mountain air, to the salt breath from the German Ocean; but if the poison had already tainted that young life, mountain and sea could not save her. She must pass through the furnace, as those others were passing.

"Poor little Polly Rainbow. The only child of a widow—the only one—like mine," he said to himself.

He sat in the garden till dusk, brooding, praying dumbly, unutterably sad. The image of the widow of Nain was in his mind while he sat there. The humble funeral train; the mourning mother; and that divine face shining out of the little group of peasant faces, radiant with intellect and faith—among them but not of them—and the uplifted hand beckoning the dead man from the bier.

"The age of miracles is past," he thought; "there is no Saviour in the land to help *me*. In my day of darkness heaven made no sign. I was left to suffer as the worms suffer under the ploughshare, and to wriggle back to life as best I could, like them."

It was growing towards the summer darkness when he rose and went into the house, where he questioned the butler, whom he met in the hall. Mr. Porter had been brought back, and had seen Miss Greswold. He had found her just a little feverish, and had ordered her to go to bed. Mrs. Greswold was sitting with her. Did Dr. Porter seem anxious? No, not at all anxious, but he was going to send Miss Laura some medicine before bedtime.

It was after nine now, but Greswold could not stay in the

house. He wanted to know how it fared with his sick tenantry, most of all with the little flaxen-haired girl he had so often noticed of late.

He went out into the road that led into the village—a scattered colony—a cottage here and there—or a cluster of cottages, and gardens on a bit of rising ground above the road. There was a common a little way from the Manor, a picturesque, irregular expanse of hollows and hillocks, skirted by a few cottages, and with a fir plantation shielding it from the north. Mrs. Rainbow's cottage stood between the common and the fir wood—an old half-timbered cottage, very low, with a bedroom in the roof, and a curious dormer window, with a thatched arch above the lattice, like a projecting eyebrow. The little bit of garden was aflame with scarlet bean blossom, roses, and geraniums, and the perfume of sweet peas filled the air.

Greswold heard the doctor talking in the upper chamber as he stood by the gate. The deep, grave tones were audible in the evening stillness, and there was another sound that chilled the Squire's heart, the sound of a woman's suppressed weeping.

He waited at the gate. He had not the nerve to go into the cottage and face that sorrowing widow. It seemed to him as if the child's peril were his fault. It was not enough that he had taken all reasonable precautions. He ought to have foreseen the idiocy of his servants. He ought to have been more on the alert to prevent evil.

The great round moon came slowly up out of a cluster of Scotch firs. How black the branches looked against that red light. Slowly, slowly, sliding upward in a slanting line, the moon stole in at the back of those black branches, and climbed into the open sky.

How often Lola had watched such a moonrise at his side, and with what keen eyes she had noted the beauty and the glory of the spectacle. It was not that he had trained her to observe and to feel the loveliness of nature. With her it had been an instinct, born with her, going before the wisdom of maturity, the cultivated taste of travelled experience.

To-night she was lying in her darkened room, the poor head heavy and painful on the pillow. She would not see that exquisite moon rise yonder in that cloudless sky.

"No matter, she will see it to-morrow, I hope," he said to himself, trying to be cheerful. "I am a morbid fool to torment myself; she has been subject to headaches of late. Mildred is right."

And then he remembered that death and sorrow were near—close to him as he stood watching the moon. He remembered poor little Polly Rainbow, and grew despondent again.

A shrill cry, a woman's agonized shriek, broke the soft summer stillness, and pierced George Greswold's heart.

"The child is dead," he thought.

Yes, poor little Polly was gone. The widow came out to the gate presently, sobbing piteously, and clasped Mr. Greswold's hand and cried over it, broken down by her despair, leaning against the gate-post, as if her limbs had lost the power to bear her up.

"Oh, sir, she was my all," she sobbed; "she was my all."

She could say no more than this, but kept repeating it again and again. "She was all I had in the world; the only thing I cared for."

George Greswold touched her shoulder with protecting gentleness. There was not a peasant in the village for whom he had not infinite tenderness—pitying their infirmities, forgiving their errors, inexhaustible in benevolence towards them all. He had set himself to make his dependents happy, as the first duty of his position. And he had done them evil unwittingly. He had cost this poor soul her dearest treasure—her ewe lamb.

"Bear up if you can, my good soul," he said, "I know that it is hard."

"Ah, sir, you'd know it better if it was your young lady that was stricken down," exclaimed the widow bitterly; and the squire walked away from the cottage gate without another word.

Yes, he would know it better then. His heart was heavy enough now. What would it be like if *she* were smitten?

She was much the same next day, languid, with an aching head and some fever. She was not very feverish. On the whole the doctor was hopeful, or he pretended to be so. He could give no positive opinion yet, nor could Dr. Pond. They were both agreed upon that point; and they were agreed that the polluted water in the garden well had been the cause of the village epidemic.

Mr. Greswold hastened his preparations for the journey to Scotland with a feverish eagerness. He wrote to engage a sleeping carriage on the Great Northern. They were to travel on Thursday, leaving home before noon, and starting for the North in the evening. If Lola's illness were indeed the slight indisposition which everybody hoped it was, she might be quite able to travel on Thursday, and the change of air and the movement would do her good.

"She is always so well in Scotland," said her father.

No, there did not seem much amiss with her. She was very sweet, and cheerful even when her father went into her room to sit beside her bed for a quarter of an hour or so. The doctors had ordered that she should be kept very quiet, and a hospital nurse had been fetched from Salisbury to sit up at night with her. There was no necessity for such care, but it was well to do even a little too much where so cherished a life was at stake. People had but to look at the father's face to know how precious that frail existence was to him. Nor was it less dear to the mother;

but she seemed less apprehensive, less bowed down by gloomy forebodings.

Yes, Lola was quite cheerful for those few minutes in which her father sat by her side. The strength of her love overcame her weakness. She forgot the pain in her head, the weariness of her limbs, while he was there. She questioned him about the villagers.

"How is little Polly going on?" she asked.

He could not tell the truth. It would have hurt him too much to speak to her of death.

"She is going on very well; all is well, love," he said, deceiving her for the first time in his life.

This was on Tuesday, and the preparations for Scotland were still in progress. Mr. Greswold's talk with his daughter was all of their romantic Highland home, of the picnics and rambles, the fishing excursions, and sketching parties they would have there. The nurse sat in a corner and listened to them with a grave countenance, and would not allow Mr. Greswold more than ten minutes with his daughter.

He counted the hours till they should be on the road for the north. There would be the rest of Tuesday and all Wednesday. She would be up and dressed on Wednesday, no doubt; and on Thursday morning the good old grey carriage horses would take them all off to Romsey Station, such a pretty drive on a summer morning, by fields and copses, with changeful glimpses of the silvery Test.

Dr. Pond came on Tuesday evening, and found his patient not quite so well. There was a long conference between the two doctors, and then the nurse was called in to receive her instructions; and then Mr. Greswold was told that the journey to Scotland must be put off for a fortnight at the very least.

He received the sentence as if it had been his death warrant. He asked no questions. He dared not. A second nurse was to be sent over from Southampton next morning. The two doctors had the cool, determined air of men who are preparing for a battle.

Lola was light-headed next morning; but with intervals of calmness and consciousness. She heard the church bell tolling, and asked what it meant.

"It's for Polly Rainbow's funeral," answered the maid who was tidying the room.

"Oh, no," cried Lola, "that can't be. Father said she was better."

And then her mind began to wander, and she talked of Polly Rainbow as if the child had been in the room: talked of the little girl's lessons at the parish school, and of a prize that she was to get.

After that all was darkness, all was despair—a seemingly inevitable progress from bad to worse. Science, care, love, prayers

—all were futile ; and the bell that had tolled for the widow's only child tolled ten days afterwards for Lola.

It seemed to George Greswold as those slow strokes beat upon his brain, heavily, heavily, like minute guns, that all the hopes and cares and joys and expectations life had held for him were over. His wife was on her knees in the darkened house from which the funeral train was slowly moving, and he had loved her passionately ; and yet it seemed to him as if the open car yonder with its coffin hidden under snow white blossoms, was carrying away all that had ever been precious to him upon this earth.

“She was the morning, with its promise of day,” he said to himself. “She was the spring time, with its promise of summer. While I had her I lived in the future, henceforward I can only live in the present ; I dare not look back upon the past !”

CHAPTER VII.

DRIFTING APART.

GEORGE GRESWOLD and his wife spent the rest of that fatal year in a villa on the Lake of Thun, an Italian villa, with a campanello tower, and a long white colonnade, and stone balconies overhanging lawn and gardens, where the flowers grew in a riotous profusion. The villa was midway between two of the boat stations and there was no other house near, and this loneliness was its chief charm for those two heart-broken mourners. They yearned for no sympathy ; they cared for no companionship—hardly even that of each other, close as the bond of love had been hitherto. Each seemed to desire above all things to be alone with that great grief—to hug that dear sad memory in silence and solitude. Only to see them from a distance, from the boat yonder, as it glided swiftly past that flowery lawn and gracious villa—that paradise in little—an observer would have guessed at sorrow and bereavement from the mere attitude of either mourner—the man sitting with his head bent forward brooding on the ground, the unread newspaper lying across his knee—the woman on the other side of the lawn, beyond speaking distance, half reclining in a low basket chair, with her hands clasped above her head, gazing at the distant line of snow mountains in listless vacancy. The huge tan-coloured St. Bernard, snapping with his great cavern-like jaws at infinitesimal flies, was the only object that gave life to the picture.

The boats went by in sunshine and cloud ; the boats went by under torrential rain, which seemed to fuse lake and mountains, villas and gardens, into one watery chaos ; the boats went by, and the days passed like the boats and made no difference in the lives of those two mourners. Nothing could ever make any difference

to either of them for evermore, it seemed to Mildred. It was as if some spring had broken in the machinery of life. Even love seemed dead.

"And yet he was once so fond of me, and I of him," thought the wife, watching her husband's face with its curious look of absence—the look of a window with the blind down.

There were times when that look of utter abstraction almost frightened Mildred Greswold. It was an expression she had seen occasionally during her daughter's lifetime, and which had always made her anxious. It was the look about which Lola used to say when they all met at the breakfast table :

"Papa has had his bad dream again."

That bad dream was no invention of Lola's, but a stern reality in George Greswold's life. He would start up from his pillow in an agony, muttering broken sentences in that voice of the sleeper which seems always different from his natural voice—as if he belonged to another world. Cold beads of sweat would start out upon his forehead, and the wife would put her arms round him and soothe him, as a mother soothes her frightened child, until the muttering ceased and he sank upon the pillow exhausted, to lapse into quiet sleep, or else awoke and regained calmness in awakening.

The dream—whatever it was—always left its mark upon him next day. It was a kind of nightmare, he told his wife when she gently questioned him, not urging her questions lest there should be pain in the mere recollection of that horrid vision. He could give no graphic description of that dream. It was all confusion—a blurred and troubled picture—but that confusion was in itself agony.

Rarely were his mutterings intelligible—rarely did his wife catch half-a-dozen consecutive words from those broken sentences—but once she heard him say :

"The cage—the cage again—iron bars—like a wild beast."

And now that absent and cloudy look which she had seen in her husband's face after the bad dream was there often. She spoke to him sometimes and he did not hear. She repeated the same questions twice, or thrice, in her soft, low voice, standing close beside him, and he did not answer. There were times when it was difficult to arouse him from that deep abstraction ; and at such times the utter blankness and solitude of her own life weighed upon her like a dead weight, an almost unbearable burden.

"What is to become of us both in all the long years before us," she thought despairingly. "Are we to be always far apart—living in the same house, spending all our days together, and yet divided."

She had married before she was eighteen, and at one-and-thirty was still in the bloom of womanhood, younger than most women of that age, for her life had been subject to none of those vicissitudes

and fevers which age women of the world. She had never kept a secret from her husband, never trembled at opening a milliner's account, or blushed at the delivery of a surreptitious letter. The struggles for pre-eminence—the social race in which some women waste their energies and strain their nerves—were unknown to her. She had lived at Enderby Manor as the flowers lived, rejoicing in the air and the sunshine, drinking out of a cup of life in which there mingled not one drop of poison. Thus it was that not one line upon the transparent skin marked the passage of a decade. The violet eyes had the limpid purity, and the sweet emotional lips the tender carnation of girlhood. Mildred Greswold was as beautiful at thirty-one as Mildred Fausset had been at seventeen. And yet it seemed to her that life was done, and that her husband had ceased to care for her.

Many and many an hour, in that lovely solitude beside the lake, she sat with hands loosely clasped in her lap or above her head, with her books lying forgotten at her feet—all the newest books that librarians could send to tempt the jaded appetite of the reader—and her eyes gazing vacantly over the blue of the lake or the snow-peaks on the horizon. Often in these silent musings she recalled the past, and looked at the days that were gone as at a picture.

She remembered just such an autumn as this, a peerless autumn, spent with her father at the Hook—spent for the most part on the river and in the garden, the sunny days and moonlit nights being far too lovely for any one to waste indoors. Her seventeenth birthday was not long past. It was just ten years since she had come home to that house to find Fay had vanished from it, and to shed bitter tears for the loss of her companion. Never since that time had she seen Fay's face. Her questions had been met coldly, angrily even, by her mother, and even her father had answered her with unsatisfactory brevity.

All she could learn was that Fay had been sent to complete her education at a finishing school at Brussels.

"At school! Oh, poor Fay. I hope she is happy."

"She ought to be," Mrs. Fausset answered peevishly, "The school is horridly expensive. I saw one of the bills the other day. Simply *enormous*. The girls are taken to the opera, and have all sorts of ridiculous indulgencies."

"Still, it is only school, mother, not home," said Mildred compassionately.

This was two years after Fay had vanished. No letter had ever come from her to Mildred, though Mildred was able to write now, in her own sprawling childish fashion, and would have been delighted to answer any such letter. She had herself indited various epistles to her friend, but had not succeeded in getting them posted. They had drifted to the waste paper basket, mute evidences of wasted affection.

As each holiday time came round the child asked if Fay were coming home, always to receive the same saddening negative.

One day, when she had been more urgent than usual, Mrs. Fausset lost temper and answered sharply:

"No, she is not coming. She is never coming. I don't like her, and I don't intend ever to have her in any house of mine, so you may as well leave off plaguing me about her."

"But, mother, why don't you like her?"

"Never mind why; I don't like her. That is enough for you to know."

"But, mother, if she is father's daughter and my sister you ought to like her," pleaded Mildred, very much in earnest.

"How dare you say that—you must not say it again—you are a naughty, cruel child to say such things," exclaimed Mrs. Fausset, beginning to cry.

"Why naughty, why cruel? Oh, mother!" and Mildred cried too. She clasped her arms round her mother's neck and sobbed aloud.

"Dear mother, indeed I'm not naughty," she protested, "but Bell said Fay was papa's daughter. 'Of course she's his daughter,' Bell said, and if she's father's daughter she's my sister, and it's wicked not to love one's sister. The psalm I was learning yesterday says so, mother. 'How sweet and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.' And it means sisters just the same, Miss Colville said, when I asked her; and I do love Fay. I can't help loving her."

"You must never speak her name again to me," said Mrs. Fausset resolutely. "I shall leave off loving you if you plague me about that odious girl!"

"Then wasn't it true what Bell said?"

"Of course not."

"Mother, would it be wrong for papa to have a daughter?" asked Mildred, perplexed by this mysterious resentment for which she could understand no cause.

"Wrong! It would be *infamous*."

"Would God be angry?" asked the child, with an awe-stricken look. "Would it be wicked?"

"It would be the worst possible insult to *me*," said Lord Castle-Connel's daughter, ignoring the minor question.

After this Mildred refrained from all further speech about the absent girl to her mother; but as the years went by she questioned her father from time to time as to Fay's whereabouts.

"She is very well off, my dear. You need not make yourself unhappy about her. She is with a very nice family, and has altogether pleasant surroundings."

"Shall I never see her again, father?"

"Never's a long day, Mildred. I'll take you to see her by-and-by when there is an opportunity. You see it happens unfor-

fortunately that your mother does not like her, so it is better she should not come here. It would not be pleasant for her—or for me.”

He said this gravely, with a somewhat dejected look, and Mildred felt somehow that even to him it would be better to talk no more of her lost companion.

As the years went by Mrs. Fausset changed from a woman of fashion to a nervous valetudinarian. It was not that she loved pleasure less, but her beauty and her health had both begun to dwindle and fade at an age when other women are in their prime. She fretted at the loss of her beauty—watched every wrinkle, counted every grey hair, lamented over every change in the delicate colouring which had been her chief charm.

“How pretty you are growing, Mildred,” she exclaimed once, with a discontented air, when Mildred was a tall, slender slip of fourteen. “You are just what I was at your age; and you will grow prettier every day until you are thirty, and then you will begin to fade as I have done, and feel an old woman as I do.”

It seemed to her that her own charms dwindled as her daughter grew. As the bud unfolded the flower faded. She felt almost as if Mildred had robbed her of her beauty. She would not give up the pleasures and excitement of society. She consulted half a dozen fashionable physicians and would not obey one of them. They all prescribed the same repulsive treatment—rest, early hours, country air, with gentle exercise—no parties, no excitement, no strong tea.

Mrs. Fausset disobeyed them all, and, from only fancying herself ill, grew to be really ill, and from chronic lassitude developed an organic disease.

She lingered nearly two years, a confirmed invalid, suffering a good deal, and giving other people a great deal of trouble. She died soon after Mildred’s sixteenth birthday, and on her death-bed she confided freely in her daughter, who had attended upon her devotedly all through her illness, neglecting everything else in the world for her mother’s sake.

“You are old enough to understand things that must once have seemed very mysterious to you now, Mildred,” said Maud Fausset, lying half hidden in the shadow of muslin bed-curtains, with her daughter’s hand clasped in hers, perhaps forgetting how young that daughter was in her own eagerness for sympathy. “You couldn’t make out why I disliked that horrid girl so much, could you?”

“No, indeed, mother.”

“I hated her because she was your father’s daughter, Mildred. His natural daughter. The child of some woman who was not his wife. You are old enough now to know what that means. You were reading the ‘Heart of Midlothian’ to me last week—you know, Mildred?”

Yes, Mildred knew. She hung her head at the memory of that sad story, and at the thought that her father might have sinned like George Staunton.

"Yes, Mildred, she was the child of some woman he loved before he married me. He must have been desperately in love with the woman or he would never have brought her daughter into my house. It was the greatest insult he could offer to me."

"Was it, mother?"

"Was it? Why, of course it was. How stupid you are, child," exclaimed the invalid, peevishly; and the wasted, feverish hand grew hotter as she talked.

Mildred blushed crimson at the thought of this story of shame. Poor Fay; poor, unhappy Fay. And yet her strong, clear, common sense told her that there were two sides to the question.

"It was not Fay's fault, mother," she said gently. "No one could blame Fay, or be angry with *her*. And if the—wicked woman was dead, and father had repented, and was sorry, was it very wrong for him to bring my sister home to us?"

"Don't call her your sister," exclaimed Mrs. Fausset with a feeble scream of angry alarm; "she is not your sister—she is no relation—she is nothing to you. It was an insult to bring her across my threshold. You must be very stupid, or you must care very little for *me*, if you can't understand that. His conduct proved that he had cared for that low, common woman—Fay's mother—more than ever he cared for me—perhaps he thought her prettier than me," said the invalid in hysterical parenthesis, "and I have never known a happy hour since."

"Oh, mamma, dear, not in all the years when you used to wear such lovely gowns and go to so many parties?" protested the voice of common sense.

"I only craved for excitement because I was miserable at heart. I don't think you can half understand a wife's feelings, Mildred, or you wouldn't say such foolish things. I wanted you to know this before my death. I want you to remember it always; and if you meet that odious girl avoid her as you would a pestilence. If your father should attempt to bring her here, or to Parchment Street, after I am gone——"

"He will not, mother. He will respect your wishes too much—he will be too sorry," exclaimed Mildred, bending down to kiss the hot, dry hand, and moistening it with her tears.

The year of mourning that began soon after this conversation was a very quiet interval for father and daughter. They travelled a little—spent six months in Leipsic, where Mildred studied the piano under the most approved masters—a couple of months in Paris, where her father showed her all the lions in a tranquil, leisurely way that was very pleasant—and then

they went down to the Hook, and lived there in happy idleness, on the river and in the gardens, all through a long and lovely summer.

Both were saddened at the sight of an empty chair—one sacred corner in all the prettiest rooms—where Maud Fausset had been wont to sit, a graceful languid figure, robed in white, or some pale delicate hue even more beautiful than white, in contrast with the background of palms and flowers, Japanese screen or Indian curtain. How pretty she had looked sitting there with books, and scent bottles, and dainty satin-lined basket full of some light frivolous work, which progressed by stages of half a dozen stitches a day. Her fans, her Tennyson, her palms and perfumes—all had savoured of her own fragile bright-coloured loveliness. She was gone, and father and daughter were alone together—deeply attached to each other, yet with a secret between them, a secret which made a darkening shadow across the lives of both.

Whenever John Fausset wore a look of troubled thought Mildred fancied he was brooding upon the past, thinking of that erring woman who had borne him a child, the child he had tried to fuse into his own family, and to whom her own childish heart had yearned as to a sister.

“It must have been an instinct that made me love her,” she said to herself; and then she would wonder idly what the fair sinner who had been Fay’s mother was like, and whether her father had really cared more for that frail woman than for his lawful wife.

“Poor pretty mamma, he seemed to dote upon her,” thought Mildred. “I cannot imagine his ever having loved any one as well. I cannot imagine his ever having cared for any other woman in this world.”

The formless image of that unknown woman haunted the girl’s imagination. She appeared sometimes with one aspect, sometimes another—darkly beautiful, of Oriental type, like Scott’s Rebecca—or fair and lowly born like Effie Deans—poor fragile Effie, fated to fall at the first temptation. Poetry and fiction were full of suggestions about that unknown influence in her father’s life; but every thought of the past ended in a sigh of pity for that fair wife whose happiness had been clouded over by that half-discovered mystery.

Never a word did she breathe to her father upon this forbidden subject; never a word to Bell, who was still at the head of affairs in both Mr. Fausset’s houses, and who looked like a grim and stony repository of family secrets.

(To be continued).

PATRONS OF ART.

By MARIE CORELLI,

AUTHOR OF "A ROMANCE OF TWO WORLDS," "VENDETTA," "THELMA,"
"THE HIRED BABY," ETC.

"SOCIAL influence, my dear—social influence! That is what you want," says the fashionable Mrs. Ponsonby Tomkins, eyeing with gracious condescension the young *cantatrice* who has brought her a letter of introduction from one of the first professors in Italy. "You shall come and sing at one of my 'at homes' for—for *nothing*—you understand?—and you will meet people; that is all you require."

"Push, push, my dear fellow," says my Lord Tom-Noddy, languidly staring through his eye-glass at an easel on which stands a painting, rich in colour and alive with genius, the work of a shabby, hungry-looking man, who, brush in hand, gazes hopefully at his aristocratic "swell" visitor, whom he half expects (poor fellow!) will be his best friend and benefactor. "Don't paint this kind of thing at all. Sunset, sea, clouds, mountains—all very nice—very good form. But overdone. Too many pictures of sunset, sea, clouds, mountains. I'll tell you what: you shall paint Lady Tom-Noddy's portrait for—for *nothing*, of course, and I'll get H.R.H. to notice it. Then you'll be the rage—and so will Lady Tom-Noddy!"

"Very nice, very nice indeed!" murmurs the successful stage-manager approvingly to the unknown pretty woman full of nervous force and dramatic energy, who has come to plead for work at his theatre. "Very promising. But"—and he scratches his head perplexedly—"I really *don't* think—no, I really *don't* think we have a vacancy. And if we had—you see, you have no influence to back you up. You couldn't *pose* for a little in society as a professional beauty, could you? No money? Ah!—and I suppose you couldn't get credit? That makes it very difficult. But if you *could* manage the beauty dodge, and then come on afterwards to us, we might try you. You see it really doesn't matter to us whether you act well or ill; there's only one theatre in London that goes in for the *art* of the thing at all, and that's the Lyceum. We don't pretend to compete with Henry Irving. We say: 'Will a woman go down with the public, or

won't she?' That's the test. Look at Mrs. Tom Tiddler. She can't act a bit; but she draws, and she'll draw more by-and-by. You can act, evidently; but that's no use—not a bit."

"Poetry!—verse! Publish at our own risk! My dear sir, you must be dreaming!" gasps the astonished eminent publisher, looking almost reproachfully at the noble head and flashing eyes of the new author who has just called upon him. "If we brought this book out we should have to charge you with all the expenses, including advertising; it would probably cost you some fifty or sixty pounds, and be a dead failure into the bargain. Certainly, I admit the poems are fine—exceptionally so—but what does that matter? You might be a second Shakespeare; it wouldn't affect us a bit. Besides, the critics are always 'down' on verse; it's their great fun. Poetry doesn't pay nowadays; nobody wants it. Of course, if you had plenty of money to throw away it might be a different matter, but you say you've got none. In that case—dear me!"—here he glances anxiously at his watch—"I haven't another moment to spare. Pray excuse me! Sorry I can't meet your wishes. *Good morning.*" And the eminent publisher hurries into his private den, leaving the poet to pocket his manuscript and wend his way sorrowfully homewards, thinking, perchance: "Where are the encouragers of Art in these days?"

True, where are they? Are Mrs. Ponsonby Tomkins and my Lord Tom-Noddy types of those whose privilege it is to have much of this world's goods given to them, and whose duty it therefore is to assist those upon whom Fortune frowns, but for whom Art smiles? Oh, my lords and ladies! artists have very little reason to be grateful to you. They know too well the limits of your generosity. You will subscribe large sums to charities where your names can be printed in newspapers and circulars as having given so much, but for the struggling genius for whom help, if offered at all, must be offered with rare delicacy and tact, you have nothing but what you call "social influence." Now, what are these high-sounding words, "social influence?" What do they mean to the gifted musician, for instance? Simply that he is expected to show off his particular talent at all the "at homes" he is invited to. Generally no payment at all is offered, or if it be, the sum is so slight that he is almost ashamed to take it; and at these afternoon or evening assemblies he "meets people." Oh, indeed! What people? A heterogeneous crowd of persons, among whom are amateur reciters, ballad singers, thought readers, and other half-and-half notabilities, all supposed to be able to "do something" (otherwise they would not be invited), and all inclined to look coldly upon any new-comer, especially if that new-comer possesses real genius. Then the "at home" audience—if one can call such frivolous butterflies of fashion an audience at all—what is it? Mostly composed of

women, who are nearly all the time engaged in discussing one another's dress and appearance, and who pay no attention whatever to the music. This kind of thing, repeated over and over again throughout the London season, is supposed to be "social influence;" and in the case of a lady *artiste* it is a positive drag upon her, and by no means an aid in her career. Singer or *pianiste*, the "at home" dodge is played upon her; and to go out to fashionable houses she must perforce dress well. To dress well she must have money; but of this Mrs. Ponsonby Tomkins and her crew take no thought. They think it her duty to appear in elegant toilette, and to play or sing her best. For what?—Social influence. Say rather social fraud! Earnest, helpful influence—sincerely used on behalf of struggling, deserving artists—is little known in England, and when it is attempted, it is too often wofully misapplied.

In one of the most influential houses in London, a teacher of singing, who learned all he knows from a lady-vocalist, famous in her day, whom he deceived and afterwards abandoned—a modern Silenus of the worst type—is received as the "most trusted" friend of the family; in another, a so-called "composer," whose "drawing-room songs" are the feeblest among feeble inanities, is petted, lionized, and made as much of as if he were a second Chopin, and, in his own heart, thinks himself vastly superior to the Polish master. Here, a daub, miscalled a picture, sells for five hundred guineas, because the dauber, miscalled artist, happens to be an affable man who can give excellent dinners and stylish parties; there, a trashy set of verses is published in one of the leading magazines of the day, and why? Because its author is a lord. What hope, then, is there for the few hard-working people whose very life—body and soul—is in their art, and who cannot help showing how they despise the Brummagem goods that are accepted in place of sterling gold and silver? For this is the age of Sham:—sham jewels, sham lace, sham complexions, sham figures; and worse than these merely outward things, sham sentiment, sham love, sham benevolence, sham patriotism, sham politics, sham all—save one thing—the Love of Money. There's no sham about that! In that we are horribly, frightfully in earnest, with the selfish, devilish earnestness of professional gamblers, who behold with a cynical smile the ruin of others, themselves unmoved. Everything gives way before this chief vice and crowning passion; a trifling difference about money matters will separate old friends, will part betrothed lovers, will sow bitter dissension between husband and wife, will make brothers enemies, and will cause father and son to distrust and suspect each other's intentions.

But in matters of art is it not a question of money also? Naturally, every artist seeks some slight reward for his work;

surely "the labourer is worthy of his hire." But the unthinking "patrons" of art too often pay the "hire" to the wrong persons—to the charlatans and impostors who are to be found in every profession, from the painting of Christmas and birthday cards up to the writing of bad rhymes, which, somehow or other, find their way into seemingly respectable magazines, and who are crowding obstructions in the path of really gifted men, and by the time the world holds out the tardy wreath of honour to the long-neglected genius whom it at last acknowledges, it is generally too late. The tired hero-soul has mutely accepted its crucifixion, and turns with languor and loathing from the vinegar and gall of men's reluctant praise; it looks away, beyond, upward, to those far, vast regions where earth is accounted less than a pin's point of dew on the leaf of a flower. Such has been, such is, and such will be in nine cases out of ten, the fate of genius in all its forms. "But, dear me!" says Society pettishly, "what else can be expected? We *always* neglect our geniuses; besides, we really prefer people who are only just a little bit talented; geniuses—real geniuses—are such queer creatures! One is never quite sure what to say to them."

Very true, dear Society! I readily admit it. You don't in the least know how to meet a superior intelligence; your little hypocrisies are then no use to you; your airs and graces are practised in vain; in short, you feel mean, and uncomfortably aware of your own deficiencies? Yes, I know! I quite understand! But while I sympathize most keenly in the very natural desire you have not to see your ignorance exposed by the trenchant truthfulness of an unsuspected Socrates, or the sparkling wit of an unrecognized Molière, I do not hesitate to cry "Shame!" on a certain portion of your brilliant ranks, namely, that portion composed of the strictly "fashionable" ladies with plenty of money, who pretend to "patronize" the hard-working *artistes* of the musical profession. I will cite here one or two instances that have come under my own personal observation: one of a young lady, well-born, highly educated, ravishingly pretty, and possessing extraordinary musical genius, who called the other day on a sort of Mrs. Gorgious Midas woman, taking with her a warm letter of introduction from one of Mrs. Midas's own intimate friends. Mrs. Gorgious was dressing when the young lady arrived, and contented herself with sending a message by her servant to the effect that she was "engaged," but "would keep the artist's name and address;" just as if she were a milliner, a dressmaker, or a cleaner and trimmer of ladies' false hair, instead of being what she is—a brilliant musician and perfect *grande dame* in the highest sense of those expressive French words. Another case is as follows:—At an afternoon assembly, held in one of the best houses in town, where the host and

hostess are considered persons of some importance, being connected with Her Majesty's Household, a new Italian singer, a beautiful woman with glorious dark eyes, was asked (and the asking sounded more like a command) to sing. With a sunny smile of assent she sang—only a poet could express the delicious beauty and fulness of her splendid voice, the heart and passion with which she gave it utterance. The people in the room listened open-mouthed and staring,—she ceased,—they turned to resume their interrupted chatter, making a few remarks such as these: "Good voice?" "Ya-as. Sings very well." "Who is she?" "Oh! no one of importance—quite unknown," &c., while the hostess, walking stiffly up to her unpaid vocalist, said, "Thank you; charmed, I'm sure!" and afterwards sang, or rather shrieked forth, a song herself, all out of tune, for which she was wildly applauded by her own special toadies and flatterers. By-and-by every one filed in to tea, which was laid out in an adjoining apartment. No man offered his arm to the Italian cantatrice—she followed the crowd timidly and all alone. The titled mistress of the house forgot to hand her a cup of tea, and seeing her sitting thus sorrowfully apart, I ventured to give her mine, which had just been condescendingly bestowed on me by one of the superior sex with a glass in his eye and a black moustache, who evidently imagined himself just a trifle better-looking than the god Apollo. She accepted the poor refreshment with that sweet, sudden smile which is the peculiar charm of some Italian faces, and a "Grazie, signora!" as softly musical as the *pianissimo* of her own vocalization, and for some ten or fifteen minutes we conversed together. But every one else in the room seemed to have forgotten her presence, and yet, you may be sure, the hostess considered herself as a "patron" of the new *artiste*, who naturally would have to be grateful for the "social influence" thus exerted.

A young composer told me a little experience of his own the other day. He was invited to the house of a Mrs. Van Boodle, to her "at home," to play. "You will meet a good many influential people," wrote Mrs. Van B. He went, poor fellow, having sacrificed two or three dinners to buy his gloves, new patent leather boots and irreproachable tie, and was called upon to open the musical programme. He did so cheerily and hopefully, and received his poor round of applause. He then sat down, was introduced to nobody, was never asked to play again, and had the mortification to see a mere teacher of the piano, who played detestably (but who was the private instructor of Mrs. Van Boodle herself), asked to perform in the very middle of the proceedings, when because there were more people in the room, there was naturally more applause. This is an ordinary example of "social influence." Does Mrs. Van Boodle think, I wonder, that she has assisted that young composer by asking him to perform at the very

worst time of her "at home"—as far as appreciation was concerned—introducing him to no one, placing an inferior pianist above him and finally paying him nothing? No, Mrs. Van B., that artist has no reason whatever to be grateful to you—he simply regrets the money he spent on the new gloves and boots he bought for the occasion, and well he may, for your "influence" will never gain him the worth of them!

One more instance, though I could quote scores, and I have done. A gifted professional reciter, equal to any actress on the stage for the splendid force and fire of her delivery, was asked recently to give two recitations at the house of the Countess of Fuddlebury. She accepted with joy. She ordered an elegant dress for the occasion, and determining not to disgrace her distinguished "patrons," she hired a brougham to take her to the countess's house and back, saying to herself hopefully, "They will certainly give me ten guineas, they are so enormously rich, and I can surely afford ten-and-six for a brougham out of that." So she went in proper style, gave her recitations, and was applauded as much as the Fuddlebury "set" ever does applaud—and then—what happened? The Earl of Fuddlebury gave her a half-guinea bouquet! Alone in her brougham, returning home from her poor little triumph, she feverishly searched among the flowers for the bank note which she thought might have been delicately placed there by her noble host and hostess. Alas, she quite over-rated the good intentions of the Fuddlebury folk—a bouquet presented by an earl is a sufficient reward for anybody surely! But how about the brougham? And the dress? And the bills coming in for both? Ah, poor thing, she shed many tears over her disappointment that night!

And who shall count the heart-aches, difficulties and sorrows that beset all artists in their upward climbing? sorrows that are more often increased than lightened by the selfishness and avarice of their so-called "patrons." There is no Mæcenas nowadays to rescue the unknown Horace or Virgil who may be toiling away, on the brink of starvation, in his lonely garret. There is no great-hearted Lorenzo de Medici to foster the very earliest promises of art in the artist and encourage his budding efforts with generous praise and substantial reward. Our Prince of Wales is not like the Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, interested in all literature and art; his efforts are principally directed to the launching of "professional beauties" on the stage, where they cannot act, and where they are permitted to remain notwithstanding their incapability, to the wonder, impatience, but gradual toleration of the too good-natured British public. Plenty of money is spent in useless luxuries; there are women willing to pay fifty pounds for one dress, who would grudge five guineas to Rubinstein if he condescended to play for them privately; there are lords and dukes who will give a thousand pounds for a horse, and yet will screw

down the foreign painter who decorates their reception-rooms in superb fresco, to the uttermost farthing of meanest remuneration. But there is yet another view to be taken of the "patrons" of art as they exist in this country. Should any of the unfortunate gifted ones who have been induced to soil the wings of their genius in the miry pit-falls known as "at homes," happen to succeed at last and become famous, then, what a cackling chorus arises from the Fitz-foodles and Boodles and Ponsonby Tomkins folk!

"I patronized her!" cries one. "I introduced him!" says another.

"I used my best influence for him," remarks my lord with an air of wealthy satisfaction.

"Without us, she could never have succeeded!" adds my lady with a determined nod of triumphant self-elation. And so on. Without doubt, if great folks did exert properly the influence they have by reason of their wealth and station, they could do much for all who are in the various artistic professions, but here a new difficulty presents itself. Some of the richest people in the metropolis are those who have made their money in trade, *parvenus* who are as ignorant as they are rich and who are unable to distinguish between the artist and the *charlatan*. To be a worthy patron of art requires not only wealth, but intellectual culture, refinement, delicacy, discrimination and a great love of the beautiful. All these attributes are very rarely found in the English or American millionaire, British meanness especially, in matters of art, being proverbial. John Bull likes to stand aloof with his hands in his well-filled pockets, eyeing struggling genius with a sort of languid curiosity, and saying with praiseworthy philosophy, "Help yourselves and all your friends will love you." Naturally! for in success friends are not needed. We are always so ready to love those who don't want anything from us. I know an extremely wealthy woman, conspicuous for the large diamond rings she wears on her podgy fingers and the innumerable gold and jewelled bangles wherewith she adorns her stout arms, who was recently asked to lend a very small sum of money to one who had been her playmate in early youth, a sum which would have served as a stepping stone for him to fame and fortune. The lady professed the most sentimental tenderness for her "dear, dear old friend," but hesitated about the loan.

"How *dreadful* it would be if he could not pay it back," she said with a sigh. "It will be much better not to lend it." The value of one of her costly rings or glittering bracelets might have made her old friend's career, yet she contemplated the "dreadful" possibility of his not being able to pay back her loan; she never dreamed of making him a free gift of the sum he needed—preferring, as such fine ladies generally do prefer, the trumpery gew-gaws of personal adornment to the priceless glory of a soul's gratitude.

Are there no patrons of Art? Yes, a few, such as the King

and Queen of Italy, the Emperor and Empress of Austria, and certain wealthy heads of historical houses who flourish under the rule of these Continental potentates. But in England where shall we look for them? The "patrons" of the race-course are legion; plentiful, too, are the "patrons" of burlesque opera, where dancing in tights may be carried to the utmost limits of suggestive indelicacy. There are certain bars, too, in London, presided over by advertised barmaids, who count their "patrons" among the "nobility and gentry" by the score; but the patrons of literature, music, painting, or sculpture are few indeed. It is a hard time just now for the delicate dreams and ideals of Genius, and yet it is by Genius alone that the nation must continue to live. The names that resound to-day through the educated world are not those of wealthy merchants, brokers, traders or lofty aristocrats—they are the names of poets, historians, musicians, painters, philosophers, thinkers, they who were the very life-blood of the age in which they laboured. As some of the personages living in Dante's time are only remembered because of his power in depicting them as enduring the horrors of the "Inferno" or "Purgatorio," so it may be that this Victorian era will some day only be thought of on account of the "Great Neglected," who may be fighting with difficulties in some obscure corner at this very moment, unrecognized by so much as a commendatory line in the daily or weekly press. Queen Elizabeth was a great personage in her time—her revels at Kenilworth were no doubt as brilliant as any attending Queen Victoria's "Jubilee"—yet she seems a shadowy and uncertain figure compared to the all-embracing existence of Shakespeare.

Therefore, though it is hard, up-hill work, dear sons and daughters of Art, let none of you despond or faint by the way. You are not so much in need of pity as are your so-called "patrons," for their eyes are blinded to all but things temporal, while yours can gaze undazzled upon things eternal. For you the birds sing their secrets; for you the flowers talk; for you the clouds build fairy palaces; to you the great heart of Nature is bared as a scroll on which divine meanings are clearly inscribed. Your "patrons," most of them at least, see none of these wonders. For them the curtain is down—fortune never comes with both hands full. Where she bestows great wealth she often denies the enjoyment of true benevolence; where she gives affluence and luxury, she refuses to add with it the understanding of brotherly love and charity. Be cheerful, O artists of all grades; be brave and work on patiently; for if your reward come not in this foolish brief bubble of a world, have no fear but that the Highest Patron of all—the Creator of Art and the Final Perfector of Beauty—will satisfy at last the unutterable longings of those among His faithful servitors, who, tried in searching fire, have *not* been found wanting.

A FAIR DECEIVER.

By LADY DUFFUS HARDY,

AUTHOR OF "PAUL WYNTER'S SACRIFICE," "BERYL PORTESCUE," ETC.

NO, I shall not tell the name of the ship; those who were my fellow-passengers during those brief ten days will recognize it easily enough—and themselves, too, no doubt, for I profess my portraits to be as correct as those taken by the sun; not sufficiently flattering, perhaps, to satisfy loving eyes, but good enough for strangers, who do not care what was the shape of this man's nose or the colour of that man's hair. To those who were not of our party, one vessel will be the same as another; they may choose and christen it after their own fashion, for, after all, "What's in a name?" That question was asked three hundred years ago, and answered by Tom Hood in our own day. He proves to our satisfaction that there is a great deal in a good name but much more in a bad one.

It was a bright morning in July when I started on my first Atlantic passage, in some trepidation of spirit and anxiety of mind. First I went on an expedition from one end of the magnificent vessel to the other. It was a floating palace; so steady and strong, it seemed impossible that even the wildest waves could make a toy of it, or crush it like an egg-shell—a thing so majestic, with its iron heart beating with a regular throb, like the pulse of a strong man's life. Having satisfied myself as to the proximity of my state-room to stewardess and doctor, I went on deck to look round on my fellow-passengers. There were plenty of them; as a rule they were mere commonplace specimens of humanity, such as nature turns out by thousands, and merely labels "man" or "woman." But there were some exceptions; one was an elderly, stern-featured man, bronzed and weather-beaten, with small keen eyes, which looked as though they could detect a spot on the face of the sun without the aid of glasses, and so searching that, like the east wind, they would reach the marrow at a single blow. With these piercing eyes he scanned the faces of every one who came on board. His companion, for he was not alone, was a young fellow with laughing blue eyes, full of those animal spirits which work off with the early stages of manhood. Then there was a young new-married couple, returning from their wedding

tour in the old land. Before I had time to carry my inspection further, the cry of "All for the shore" came from a pair of stentorian lungs. There was a hurried hand-shaking all round, and "Good-bye," "Good-bye," echoed on every side, spoken with varying shades of feeling; some bade farewell with a choking sob, others with a tender regret, while some who were off for a brief holiday shouted a joyous *au revoir*!

In the midst of the bustle and confusion of parting and departing a little row-boat hailed the vessel, and in another moment came alongside, and a young widow, with a child in her arms, followed by a boy carrying a small cabin trunk, came on board.

"I have been detained. I was afraid I should miss the ship," she exclaimed, glancing anxiously around.

The purser had already taken the contract tickets from the rest of the passengers, and held out his hand for hers. She searched her purse, her hand-bag, turned everything over, her agitation increasing as she found the search was in vain. In deep distress, and with a look of profound dismay, she exclaimed:

"I have lost it! I had it safe when I started. What shall I do? Oh! what shall I do?"

Here our bronzed old captain came to the fore, and cast his kind grey eyes on the young widow's face. She was beginning to cry, and he patted her in a fatherly way on the shoulder.

"There, there, my dear," he said soothingly, "don't distress yourself."

"You won't send me back," she exclaimed, lifting a pair of large pleading eyes to his face, and catching his hand as drowning men catch at straws.

"No! no!" he answered, "it's all right. I'll take the risk!"

He gave the signal; we all hurried to the side of the vessel, and, with a general waving of handkerchiefs and shouting of last words, the little steam-tug which had brought the passengers on board went snorting and shrieking back to the shore, and our majestic steamer steamed down the river, out towards the dreaded Irish Channel.

That evening the captain's table was crowded. Everybody seemed to realize that the vessel was to be "home" for the next ten days. Everybody seemed socially inclined, but nevertheless took mental stock of their neighbours before deciding which companions he or she should choose, for, of course, before many hours were over we should break into little friendly parties.

The beautiful young widow, Mrs. Oliver, had the place of honour on the captain's right hand; but before this arrangement could be satisfactorily carried out the question had arisen, "What was to become of the baby during the meal?" At last a young Scotchman, Malcolm Macdonald, volunteered to immolate himself on the altar of beauty, and, animated by a grateful

glance from the widow's soft brown eyes, he disappeared up the companion-way, holding the screeching baby upside down, which was perhaps excusable, it being the first time he had officiated as dry-nurse.

The captain, in his capacity as host, did his best to make things go cheerily. He set the ball of conversation rolling, and if it was not fairly bowled onwards it was no fault of his.

Meanwhile, a game of speculation was being invisibly carried on; telegraphic communication was passed from eye to eye, conjectural phrases flew round, and the current of observation set in strongly towards the young widow's quarter. She meanwhile seemed quite unconscious of the curiosity she was creating. She sat silent and reserved, with a shade of melancholy upon her countenance, equally unconscious of the admiring glances of the one sex or the critical appraisement of the other. She was monosyllabic in her answers to special questions, and in reply to general observations she merely glanced up and smiled—with such a smile! One longed to catch the upward glance and smile again. She had beautiful brown eyes, and her black dress set off to the best advantage her fair complexion and curling golden hair.

The young bride, Mrs. Howard, looked across the table with a supercilious air. She had caught her liege lord's glances wandering that way oftener and with warmer admiration than she quite approved. Once he ventured to nudge her elbow, levying an unlicensed tax upon her admiration. She refused to honour his demand, and obstinately turned her eyes in another direction.

After dinner all went their several ways, some to the smoking room, some lounged over the bulwarks, others joined the cry of "Yo, heave ho!" and helped or hindered the sailors in hauling the ropes, for the wind was freshening. All sails were set to catch the breeze; and the vessel, like a beautiful white bird with outspread wings, floated along, cutting her way through the water with a steady rapidity that had an exhilarating effect upon everybody; we felt as if we ourselves were floating over the water. The "briny kisses of the great sweet mother" stirred the soul into open rejoicing, and bursts of laughter and cheerful voices echoed on all sides. Meanwhile, the pretty bride and her athletic bridegroom paced the deck in gloomy silence; she, because she was wrathfully disposed; he, because he had nothing to say; he rarely had much to say; conversation was not his strong point. Presently he became vaguely aware that there was something unusual in the continued silence, and he broke it, adding insult to injury.

"I say, Kate!" he exclaimed.

"Well."

"Isn't she a stunning creature!"

"Who?"

"Why, the widow, of course; one doesn't often see such a fine woman; clean and smart—not a bad point about her."

"You talk as though you were studying a horse," was the freezing reply.

"So she is, she's a *mère*, mare! Not bad that! don't you see? *mère*—mother; mare, horse?" He laughed heartily at his own wit, and nudged his wife's elbow, as a means of wakening her understanding to a full appreciation. She smiled faintly, and he followed up his advantage, adding, "Wonderfully reserved, though, and quiet, isn't she? Never once opened her lips."

"She opened her mouth though, and put plenty into it. The way she ate was perfectly disgusting; putting the knife into her mouth, too! I thought she was going to swallow it."

"Ah! that looks queer—very," he observed sagaciously. "I should like to know her history—I'm sure she's got one."

Here Mr. Jaggers, the tall strange-looking man who had first attracted my attention, joined them in their promenade, and somehow, after a slight passing observation concerning the weather, the conversation drifted towards the beautiful Mrs. Oliver. Mr. Jaggers protested he had not seen her face. "Besides, he didn't pay much attention to women—didn't believe in 'em."

"Jaggers don't believe in anything," rejoined his young companion, whom he called "Charlie," but who was registered as "Stokes." "Now, I believe in everything, especially in women, from my own grandmother down to 'Ginx's baby.' I mean to get up a flirtation with that widow if I can."

"I don't suppose you'll have much trouble, for all she seems so reserved and shy," said Mrs. Howard, with a toss of her head.

"She doesn't talk much at present, certainly," observed Mr. Stokes, "but I daresay she'll put the steam on by-and-by."

"I think she's stupid," observed the bride.

"She can afford to be stupid," said the obtuse but chivalrous bridegroom, "for she's deucedly handsome."

"If a woman doesn't talk wisely or look well, she is not fit to live," said Charlie Stokes; "she certainly does the one, and it is not every one who can do both—like yourself," he added with an insinuating smile, at which bare-faced compliment the lady simpered and her liege lord's face radiated. He nudged her elbow, his usual way of calling her attention.

"Oh, I say, Kate! come, after that——" He did not finish his speech, he rarely did; he stumbled in the middle and then cut himself adrift altogether.

At this moment they were approaching the bow of the vessel; the golden-haired widow had seated herself upon a coil of ropes, and was looking over the bulwarks watching the white foam-flakes rushing along and leaping up the sides of the vessel. As the group came near she glanced up and met the full gaze of Mr. Jaggers' searching eyes; hers drooped, she turned away.

"My God!" he exclaimed in a low, smothered tone, though not so low but it reached the ears of his young friend Stokes.

"Why—what is it? What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Nothing. I was struck by a likeness, that's all. I fancy I must have seen her before somewhere," replied Mr. Jagers.

"And I should say she was the very last person in the world whom *you* would be likely to see; quite off your beat. Look at her; she's a lady—no doubt about that. But you are always finding out likenesses—a dangerous faculty that. Only yesterday you said I was like somebody who was hanged ten years ago."

The next day was stormy; there were no ladies on deck, and few gentlemen. The sea had worked itself into a state of foaming fury. There was a high wind, all sails were set, and the vessel made rapid way, going at the rate of fifteen knots an hour, cutting her way bravely through the watery mountains which reared and rose on all sides of her. Indeed, everything rose except our spirits, and they fell below zero as we lay moaning in our cabins. The next day the weather moderated; the storm passed, leaving only a heavy swell behind it. We heard the tramp of footsteps overhead, and cheerful voices full of exuberant healthy spirits exchanging "Good mornings;" merry jests and jokes were passing round, judging by the bursts of laughter that greeted us. Then, one by one we crept on deck, as flies creep out of a crevice, to enjoy the first gleam of sunshine.

Mrs. Oliver was already on deck, looking as handsome as a picture in her crimson hood, carrying what young Stokes stigmatized as "that shrieking abomination" in her arms. Many strong arms would have relieved her of it, but her manner was repellent, and seemed to resent rather than be grateful for any attention, either from her own or the opposite sex. The gentlemen, especially the younger portion, felt aggrieved to see this young creature so heavily weighted, but had not courage to press their undesired services upon her.

"What big brutes we are," growled the admiring young Scotchman; "great hulking fellows, lounging about with our hands in our pockets, while she—by Jove! I can't stand it!"

He strode across the deck, and made straight for the young widow.

"Allow me, please," he exclaimed, taking the sturdy boy from her unresisting hands, and marching away in triumph, holding it with the grace of an elephant, and making the most ridiculous zoological noises to amuse it.

Mrs. Oliver simply yielded the child to him, without a caress or a tender word. Indeed, it was observed that she never showed any maternal tenderness to her boy, only a kind of wooden devotion. Relieved from her charge she sat down. Mr. Stokes strolled up and stood beside her.

"Your first voyage?" he inquired, taking up the initiatory

step towards the proposed flirtation, which threatened, however, to be a more difficult matter than he at first imagined.

"Yes," she answered briefly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully together. "I hope we shall have a jolly time; though last night wasn't very promising."

"Wasn't it?" she said languidly, as though she had no interest in the matter.

"Well, scarcely," he answered, opening his eyes. "We don't often have that kind of weather in July. Why even poor old Jagers was down, and it takes a good deal to bowl *him* over."

"Jagers! Who is Jagers?" she asked, lifting her beautiful eyes to his face, and for the first time waking up with some little interest.

"Well, Jagers is a friend of mine," replied Stokes. "There he is—that grim-looking, elderly party."

"I know that," she answered impatiently. "I mean, what is he?"

"Oh, what is he!" echoed Mr. Stokes, slightly taken aback. "Well, that's a facer. He don't care for everybody to know exactly what he is."

"No?" she exclaimed in sweet surprise. "At first I thought he was the captain; he looks like an officer."

"You're near it. You wouldn't like to sail in his ship, though. You'd be sure to get wrecked; perhaps landed between four stone walls."

"I don't understand," she answered, glancing up at him with a puzzled look. The young man looked away over the sea, as though he did not want to be tempted into further confidences. "I should like to know," she added, "but, of course, don't tell me if it is a secret. He is very like some one I have seen before."

"By Jove! that's exactly what he said of you!"

"Really. Well, who knows? We may turn out to be old friends. I am more than ever interested in Mr. Jagers."

"He is the last man in the world I should have thought likely to interest a lady. It would pay much better to be interested in *me*," he added with a light laugh.

"Oh, there is interest and interest," rejoined Mrs. Oliver, as she dropped her eyes and turned away.

The young man was silent for a moment, and then rejoined, with the confidence beauty frequently inspires in his inexperienced sex:

"I'm sure you're to be trusted, Mrs. Oliver; but it doesn't do to let these things get afloat. We don't want everybody to know everything."

"Of course not."

"Well," he added confidentially, "Jagers is A.1 at Scotland

Yard; a first-rate hand. Once give him the scent, he is like a bloodhound—sure to run his man down.”

“Ah! a police detective?” she exclaimed. He nodded. “Oh! what a dreadful man!”

“Not at all,” rejoined Mr. Stokes; “he’s one of the best fellows in the world, except in the way of business, then he is as hard as nails.”

The announcement that he was “as hard as nails” did not seem to increase his popularity in the young widow’s eyes.

“It is a mean sneaky way of getting a living,” she observed, “and all the talking in the world can’t make it anything else.”

“I don’t know about that,” he answered, “one evil creates another, you know. So long as thieves run ahead there must be somebody to catch them. On the whole I think the detective is a grand institution, a necessary one, too, and so you’d think if you had lost your jewellery, and he,” jerking his head towards Jagers, “was to find it for you.”

“I suppose I should,” she answered demurely; “in such cases we are apt to be selfish.”

“Yes,” replied the young fellow, “and generally speaking, we are quite ready to shake hands with the sinner when we benefit by the sin.”

“Perhaps,” she answered, glancing up with a shy, winning smile into his face, “but I don’t think I should choose the sinner for my travelling companion, especially on a pleasure excursion,” she added emphatically. He laughed and rubbed his hands together as though he rather enjoyed the idea.

“So you think we’re on a pleasure excursion?” he chuckled.

“At least it looks like it,” she answered.

“Ah! but you shouldn’t judge by appearances; it is quite the reverse, and you—well, I suppose we have been speculating about one another; I vote that we strike a bargain—you tell me your story and I’ll tell you ours.”

The lady looked down and played nervously with the folds of her dress, as she answered with a mournful air, as though she had just come out of the deepest affliction department:

“Mine is soon told, I—I am a widow, as you see, and I am going to join my friends in Quebec.” She looked at him, adding inquiringly, “And you?”

“Oh! we’re likely to have rather a lively time of it,” he replied half hesitating for a moment, then adding briskly, “You’ve heard of the great jewel robbery, I suppose? All London is ablaze with it. A wonderfully mysterious affair,” he added, knitting his brows, as though he had the mystery on the brain, “but I think we are on the right track now. Jagers is rather close, but I fancy I know a thing or two.”

“But what have you to do with it?” she inquired with naïve interest.

"Not much, really. I'm going partly for pleasure, partly for the purpose of identification. I think I can swear to the fellow we're after, and I know I can recognize the jewels if he has them concealed about him."

The widow regarded him with a look of furtive inquiry, as she asked in a low voice, almost under her breath:

"Is he in Canada?" He nodded confidentially.

"Sailed five days ago, but on a slower vessel than this; we shall catch him at Quebec. We have telegraphed to the police there, and they'll look after him, and take good care of him, too, till we come. Then Jagers will just slip the bracelets on, and we'll be back in England in next to no time."

"Please don't talk any more about it," she rejoined, "it makes one quite miserable to hear of such dreadful things." She got up and walked to the other side of the deck. He whistled as he leaned against the bulwarks, and watched the lithe figure pacing briskly to and fro.

"Whew!" he whistled softly. "How sensitive these women are! What a fool I was to talk to her!" He pulled his fair moustache perplexedly as he added, "What would Jagers say, I wonder?"

It was getting dark—too late for ring-toss, and shovel-board was wiped from the deck. People strolled up and down singing snatches of old songs, some indulging in desultory chit-chat—the small change of society, which always passes current when the pure gold of conversation lies like a drug in the market for want of circulation. The young married couple were seated in the bow of the vessel, feasting daintily on their honeymoon, which threatened to give out before the end of the journey. The monotonous music of the sailors' singing mingled with the cheery voice of our captain as he passed hither and thither, exchanging pleasant words by the way. He was a bronzed old sea-dog, the commodore of the line. We often wondered when our captain slept, or if he was a human machine warranted to go ten days without winding up, for he had the faculty of popping up on all parts of the vessel at the most unexpected times. His sharp eyes were everywhere. Nothing escaped his observation, from a speck on the deck to a bluebottle buzzing about the shrouds of his vessel.

As the evening closed in a drizzling rain began to fall; it seemed to damp everybody's spirits; conversation languished and the deck was speedily cleared. Some betook themselves to the saloon and improvised a concert for their own benefit, for the most lugubrious strains and mutilated fragments of popular melodies floated through the skylight and died a natural death in the evening air. Some descended to their cabins and made themselves at home there. If the sea had not been as smooth as a billiard table there would not have been much of "at home" about it; but Neptune was in a drowsy mood and all went well.

Late in the evening, young Stokes, who had been uplifting his manly voice in some love-lorn ditty, came up on deck for a last look round before retiring for the night. As he passed up the companion-way he glanced into the little deck saloon, which was generally sacred to the ladies. He quite started, he could hardly believe his eyes, for there sat Mr. Jagers and the fair widow Mrs. Oliver, engaged in a game of chess, evidently enjoying it, too. His grim harsh features were lighted up with the ghost of a smile, as she said in playful reproach, with a half-knit contemplative brow :

"Oh, how ungallant! you've castled my queen, but wait, I'll be even with you yet."

"That woman's a witch, by Jove! Poor old Jagers, a victim to female charms; at his age too!" chuckled the young fellow, as he stole away unobserved by either of them, and strolled up and down the deck ruminating.

It was late when Mr. Stokes retired to rest, and then he tossed uneasily on his pillow; he could not sleep, he had an uncomfortable feeling as though he had been defrauded of his confidence, shorn of his secret as effectually as Samson was shorn of his locks. Not only had he betrayed *himself*, but his friend also, into the hands of this modern Delilah. Then he consoled himself, reflecting, "After all it could not matter much. What harm could a woman do except talking?" Then he smiled grimly as he remembered how often a woman had talked away a man's reputation, liberty, life itself.

"Bosh," he muttered, trying to reconcile himself to himself; "when we have done our business she may talk as much as she likes; till then I'll keep an eye upon her."

The days passed away pleasantly and monotonously, as days do at sea.

Malcolm Macdonald and Charlie Stokes were assiduous in their attentions to the young widow; but it seemed to them both that she smiled on none so sweetly as on the elderly, grim, and hard-featured Jagers.

One night young Stokes, who had been sitting up playing cards and smoking, was restless and wakeful; the July night was hot, and he felt feverish, and got up to fetch a drink of iced-water. As he crossed amidships on the main deck, he saw a light at the end of the corridor, from the half-open door of Mr. Jagers' cabin.

"Poor old beggar," he muttered, "he's something like me—can't sleep; I'll rout him out to keep me company."

He quickened his pace, then stopped suddenly. Some one came out and shut the door; it was a woman! She came slowly along the passage towards him; as she crossed the strip of moonlight he recognized the face of Mrs. Oliver!

"Merciful God!" he exclaimed under his breath, as he stepped noiselessly aside, and she came nearer—nearer—and passed within

a few feet of where he stood. Her eyes were wide open, as she stared straight before her—seeing nothing—for though her eyes were open their sense was shut. He recognized the fact that she was walking in her sleep! He followed to see that she came to no harm. Having seen her safely to her cabin, he went to bed and slept soundly till morning.

As he sat down to breakfast he looked round for Mrs. Oliver, but she was not there. He said nothing to any one of what he had seen in the night; there was no purpose to be served in mentioning it; so he kept discreetly silent. He lounged by the companion-way, glancing furtively down the stairs, but the fair widow failed to make her appearance. As the day wore on, a rumour got in circulation that Mrs. Oliver was not well, and was unable to leave her cabin. The lady-passengers charged themselves with the care of the child, while the stewardess looked after the mother, so far as she would allow her to do so, but Mrs. Oliver was irritable and impatient. She refused to see the doctor, "There was nothing the matter," she said, "she only wanted to be quiet—to be let alone!" So she lay for the best part of the day with her face to the wall.

Mr. Jagers, with a haggard, watchful face, haunted the corridors; he said nothing, but his eyes followed the stewardess into the cabin, and questioned her with mute inquiry as she came out of it.

That evening we reached Father Point, and sent up a rocket to summon a pilot from the shore. Three rockets, red, white, and blue, went up in answer, "Coming." Then a white light, like a gigantic glowworm, came creeping along the face of the water, nearer and nearer, till the plish-plashing of oars brought a cockleshell of a boat alongside, and the pilot, with the agility of a cat, climbed up the huge black side of the vessel, and leaped over the bulwarks on to the deck. We got up steam and were soon once more on our way.

We paced the deck, chatting and singing snatches of old songs, all more or less excited as we approached the end of our journey. Glancing over the bulwarks, we were startled by the appearance of a huge black mass, which seemed to grow mysteriously out of the darkness, with many coloured lights swinging in the empty air. It was the steam-tug which had come off from Rimouski for the mail, and such passengers as desired to proceed direct to Lower Canada.

There was a hurrying and bustling to and fro; the mail bags were flung out from the lower deck, and about fifty steerage passengers and some few others went ashore.

The next morning general consternation sat on the official faces. One after another they proceeded to the captain's room, and held mysterious conferences there. People looked questioningly in each other's eyes, and wondered. Presently a rumour

flew from one end of the vessel to the other—Mrs. Oliver was missing!

On going to her state-room in the morning the stewardess found it empty. Hurried inquiries were whispered from one to another; at length the excitement calmed down, and a strict investigation took place. Where had she been last seen, and by whom? Mr. Stokes reluctantly stepped forward and told what he had seen on the previous night. It was a horrible idea, but at last a tangible one. She might have walked overboard in her sleep! That was the conclusion generally arrived at.

This terrible catastrophe cast a gloom over everybody's spirits, and allayed much of the excitement and pleasure of nearing the land. All day we steamed up the beautiful St. Lawrence River, with a panoramic view of picturesque and glowing scenery outspread on either side. Towards evening Quebec in her regal beauty, with the fading sunlight flashing from her thousand windows and glittering on her sloping roofs, came in sight. Then began everybody's preparations for leaving the vessel. Mr. Jagers and young Stokes scanned eagerly the faces on the landing stage. A police official came on board, followed by one or two subordinates. An order was given that no one was to leave the vessel till they had examined all the passengers. Mr. Jagers took the chief official aside, and they conversed in a low tone.

"You've got our man!" exclaimed Jagers. "He should have arrived two days ago. We wired a description and requested he should be detained."

"Never came," replied the brother-detective, adding with a curious smile, "He's here on the vessel with you."

"That's not so," said Jagers decidedly. "Do you think I'd have a rat under my nose and not smell him? I know every man on board."

"And every woman too?" inquired the officer with a significance that made him shiver. "Here, read that," he added, placing in Mr. Jagers' hand a telegram which ran thus—

"Davis did not sail as expected—you will find him on board the steamship 'Atlantean.' Disguised as a widow and accompanied by a little boy about a year old. Jewels probably concealed about him."

Jagers staggered as though he had been shot. His professional pride fell dead within him. He dashed down the stairs and in a few minutes reappeared in great agitation.

His pocket-book, with photographs, papers of identification, &c., had been stolen. Was this the widow's errand to his room the night before? Was the sleep-walking business a sham? Their wondering was soon set at rest. The dress the *soi-disant* widow used to wear was found concealed beneath a berth in an empty cabin. The disappearance, which had so perplexed everybody, was now understood. John Davis, a beardless young fellow,

the youngest of a gang which had given much trouble to the London police, had escaped from England in a widow's dress with the spoils of the great jewel robbery secreted about him !

He had evidently thrown off the fascinating golden curls which had lent such an effectual disguise and so powerful a charm to the widow's suit, and, donning his own attire, had mixed unobserved with the steerage passengers and gone off at Rimouski.

Jaggers, in sore humiliation of spirit, hid his head, covered with professional shame. His prey had flaunted and flirted before his eyes ; and though he had "castled her queen" he had never been so effectually "checkmated."

Henceforth the sight of a widow acted upon him as a red rag on a bull, and his chief delight in life was to run them down.

A LIFE INTEREST.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "AT BAY," "BY WOMAN'S WIT,"
"MONA'S CHOICE," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXIT ELLIS.

MEANWHILE, in complete unconsciousness of the schemes and passions which were twining their dark threads into the warp and woof of her simple life, Marjory held on her ordinary quiet course, striving resolutely against her own feelings, with more or less of success; restless, watchful, uneasy when Dick Cranston was present, and longing terribly for him in spite of herself when he was away. There was an extraordinary charm to her swift mercurial nature, her keen impatient perception, in his steady, gentle strength, his clear intelligence, his calmness and decision. Both his character and his appearance were in advance of his years; besides these qualities, the undeniable advantages of form and face made him pleasant to the eye. He could not be ungraceful or undignified if he tried; then he had always been so kind, so true to Marjory, so utterly forgiving, that the thought of all she had inflicted on him in the past sometimes made her heart swell with longing to repay him in some—in any—way; but she never dreamed till that day when he told her he was in love of how *she* loved him. Well, at all events, she was strong enough to hide it. It would kill her should he ever discover the true nature of her affection. But *that* he never should.

Moreover, Dick was greatly changed by his attachment to that dark-eyed French girl. He was no longer so even-tempered, so satisfied with the present, so quietly certain of the future. He was depressed, and a little inclined to take offence at what Marjory said or did. He was uneasy too about Brand, who had prolonged his absence now over a fortnight, but Marjory felt certain this was not the only source of anxiety to him.

A curious sense of expectancy kept her on the stretch; why, she could not tell. There was no visible reason why things should not go on for months as they were, still her vague but vivid construction was, "Something is going to happen."

This presentiment was, she thought, amply fulfilled by a letter

from Mrs. Carteret—an event of rare occurrence—and Marjory was much gratified by the mark of remembrance. The concluding paragraph, however, soon put all the rest out of her mind: “I find Mr. Ellis is going to spend a few days at Sir Wilfrid Trumpington’s place, somewhere near Dockborough. He has promised to take you a little present from me, and to give it into your own hand.” Ellis was coming there to worry and frighten her, but he should not succeed in doing either. She could defy him now and Dick would back her up. She wished much to tell Dick about the expected and dreaded visit, but he had quite given up his friendly habit of coming in half-an-hour or more before George returned from the office, and somehow or other Marjory did not like to write and ask him to see her alone. It was not likely that Ellis would come just yet, and some opportunity would offer, when she would give Dick Mrs. Carteret’s letter and discuss it with him.

She was alone when it reached her, and a curious reluctance to broach the subject kept her silent respecting it when both George and Dick joined her at tea; the next day she would tell them, then Dick—unless, indeed, he was too much absorbed in his French flame to care about his once beloved sister—would find some way to talk the matter over in a *tête-à-tête*.

The day went over, at once rapidly and slowly.

It was amazing what a shifting, cloudy, yet impassable barrier her self-consciousness had accumulated between her and her dear friend and confidant. She longed yet feared to mention Mrs. Carteret’s letter. The mid-day delivery brought her another, which, had it not been for the first, would have gladdened her heart. The editress of “Crums for our Chickens” was pleased with her story, which she would print at once, and pay the munificent sum of three pounds for it. “If ‘M. A.’ was disposed to submit any other productions of her pen to the editorial eye, they would be favourably considered.” This was almost beyond Marjory’s wildest hopes, and she could have cried with vexation to think how the pleasure of the little success was tarnished by the trouble that was coming on her.

“Well, I will tell George and Dick everything *this* evening, at all events,” she thought; but she had lost her chance, the momentary hesitation had been unfortunate.

It was approaching the time of George’s usual return from the office that evening, and, having made herself and all things ready for him and that other brother she loved so well, Marjory took out her aunt’s letter and read it over once more. It was dated nearly a week back and the post-mark was London. While conjecturing what this might mean the door was opened in an emphatic manner by the melancholy Mrs. Stokes, who said, “There’s one seeking you, miss.” Before Marjory could reply, Ellis stood before her.

"I do not suppose you are very glad to see me," he said with his peculiar fine smile.

"No, of course not," exclaimed Marjory, on the impulse of the moment; speaking, as she too often did, first and thinking after. "That is—I am not exactly sorry—it would be too ungracious to say so; still, you know, you do not deserve that I should be glad. How strange it is to see you here!" She gazed at him, half smiling as she compared his distinguished figure, his fashionable attire, and the homely room in which he stood.

"Do not apologize," he said; "there is war between us, but even in the bitterest warfare there are occasional truces. Imagine that I am the bearer of a white flag;" he held out his hand. Marjory put hers into it with evident reluctance. "Have I your permission to sit down?" he asked, as he released it.

"Oh, certainly."

"Then, before we quarrel afresh—as is most probable—let me present my credentials." He took from his breast-pocket a small, oblong parcel and laid it before her. "Mrs. Carteret charged me with this," he continued, "when I parted with her at Interlacken. Are you not anxious to open it?"

"It can wait," said Marjory more collectedly as she recovered from the surprise of his sudden appearance. She looked at him expectantly, as if waiting for him to speak, which he was in no hurry to do. He looked at her with keen scrutiny, and gradually a smile stole over his face. "This is not exactly a palace of delight," he said at length, "nor do you look as brightly youthful as you did, though I am not sure the tinge of pensiveness does not make you more womanly and attractive. Even now, if you were to bestow a few caresses on me and say, 'I love you,' I might lose my head again for a short time. There is some change, some new development in you, my sweet Marjory, which I don't quite understand."

"Pray, do not take the trouble to try. I am very happy here—I am of some use to my brother; we have peace and freedom."

"And you are content to live over the shop?" he interrupted. "Don't you think life might have been brighter, might have offered a little more variety, had you not broken faith with me? An apartment in Paris, theatres, galleries, the companionship of my companions, the——"

"The necessity of masking my existence from my own friends, the doubtful position——" interrupted Marjory in her turn. "No, Mr. Ellis; I infinitely prefer the honest obscurity of my present one; and you—you like to torment and annoy me, but you know you would not wish to marry me *now*." Ellis' face darkened as he said slowly, "No, Marjory, I would not marry you if I could."

"Then——" she began with animation, when George walked into the room in his office coat and with rather untidy hair. He stopped

short on the threshold, greatly surprised: "Mr. Ellis! I had no idea you were in England."

"Only for a very short time," returned Ellis, rising and shaking hands with him very cordially. "I am glad to see you have so far recovered the effects of your conflict with the madman—you are really a very plucky young fellow."

"Glad you think so; I fancy any man would have done the same," said George, drawing a chair forward. "At any rate it has pushed me on, for I have a very comfortable berth and the hope of a better when I am fit for it. It is jolly living here, with Marge to keep house for me."

"That I quite believe," replied Ellis with an air of conviction. "And you feel no ill effects from the mauling you got?"

"Not much now. The stump aches in bad weather and my head was queer for awhile, but it is nearly all right now," &c. &c.,

Ellis conversed for a few minutes with every appearance of interest, then he said blandly: "I shall not stand on ceremony with a kinsman. I am here on a secret mission from Mrs. Carteret to your sister; I was just opening the subject when you came in; perhaps you will be so good as to leave us for a few minutes."

"Oh! certainly," cried George. "It's a fine night; I'll go and take a turn; perhaps I'll meet Dick and stop him. He is almost sure to come up to-night." So saying George departed.

"You had just received my ungallant avowal, that I would not marry you if I could, with apparent satisfaction," resumed Ellis where they had left off.

"Yes," looking straight at him with frank clear eyes. "I am pleased to hear you speak honestly and sensibly. If you do not care about me any more, which is quite natural, you can forgive me, and we need not cross each other again."

"Ah! you think you can get off so easily," said Ellis with an unpleasant smile. "I should have thought so philosophic a young lady as you are would be aware that there is a curious counterpart to love, as ardent as tenacious, as ingenious. They run in parallel lines, these passions, but now and then comes a cataclysm, when the existing order of things smashes up, and these lines clash together—this other potent passion is hatred."

"But," cried Marjory, shivering a little; "you do not hate me. A mere insignificant girl, who is heartily sorry for the trouble and annoyance she caused you—you cannot hate me!"

"You forget," said Ellis sternly, "that you inflicted on me the bitterest mortification and disappointment, the most utter defeat, that man could suffer, and, my dear, delicate, disdainful Marjory, I am determined to have as much revenge as circumstances will permit; yet I will not stoop to double dealing. I warn you again, that though I do not wish to marry you myself, neither do I intend you to marry any one else, or if you do it will

be at a desperate risk. *No man would like to wed a woman with your history.*"

"I know that," she returned with a bright smile that surprised him. "But I am content never to marry; on that point I have quite made up my mind."

"Have you?" said Ellis, gazing very intently at her with knit brows.

"You are not the woman to go through life without loving—loving passionately, I count on that. It strikes me the secret of the indefinable change I notice in you is that you already love—your readiness to renounce marriage suggests that between your love and you some barrier intervenes. Ha! I have guessed right," he added, as Marjory coloured crimson and the quick beating of her heart might almost be heard.

"A barrier will always exist between me and any one I may love," she said, pride lending her composure. "How could I deceive any one I loved? Do you think I would leave it to *you* to tell the tale of my folly, or do you think I could face the shame of confessing it?"

"I cannot conjecture what you would do," said Ellis moodily.

"If you only came to see me to reiterate what you have told me many times before I think you might have spared yourself trouble and me pain. You have released me from my promise and I am not the least afraid of your threats; there can be no use in your remaining, and still less in our ever meeting again. If you can help it, don't hate me; if you cannot, why, it is worse for yourself than for me."

"I do not think I do hate you, Marjory, after all," said Ellis in a softer tone. "You exercised an extraordinary influence, some spell, upon me, and I don't think it is quite exhausted yet. You are the only woman I ever met who is transparently true, and when I am with you I am honest from contagion. How I should have liked always to live under the influence of that contagion is another matter. However, I owe you a large debt, and hatred or no hatred, my sense of justice to myself will compel me to pay it whenever I can. I suspect the first instalment is being lodged now, or I am much mistaken. Good-bye, Marjory; I am going up to town to-night and shall not——"

He was interrupted by the abrupt entrance of Dick followed by George.

"Have we come in too soon?" asked the latter. "It seemed a long time and Dick there is raging for his tea." Dick bestowed a stiff bow and a very stern look on Ellis. Not speaking a word to Marjory he planted himself beside the fireplace.

"Oh, no—by no means," replied Ellis graciously; "we had discussed our secrets and were talking on mere commonplace subjects." He rose. "Then you will write fully to Mrs. Carteret yourself," he said, offering his hand to Marjory; "and so I must

reluctantly wish you good evening. Glad to have found you so well," shaking hands with George. "Ah! my friend, the young mason, still dabbling in stones and mortar?"

"Still doing honest work, I hope," returned Dick sharply.

"Indeed, not a common style of art," and with a general bow and a warning look to Marjory, which she alone perceived, he retreated.

Dick looked after him, the most angry expression Marjory had ever seen on his face, and then turned his eyes on her with no diminution of displeasure, to her great surprise.

To divert attention from herself she exclaimed: "Let us see what Aunt Carteret has sent me," and proceeded to open the parcel Ellis had left with her.

Unfolding many papers she came to a neat morocco case, on opening which a bracelet, brooch and earrings of classic heads carved in lava appeared. Marjory exclaimed and admired the more warmly because Dick was ominously silent. What could be the matter with him?

"Are they not pretty, Dick?" she persisted, holding out the case to him.

"Yes, they do great credit to Mr. Ellis' taste," he said carelessly.

"But they are Aunt Carteret's choice. Do you suppose Mr. Ellis would make *me* a present?"

"I do not know, I am sure," contemptuously.

"Come, Marge, let us have tea," cried George, and no more was said. The trio however were out of tune; George rattled away as usual, but a curious embarrassment hung round Marjory and Dick, though the latter made an effort to throw off his ill-humour.

"I wonder what a high and mighty chap like Ellis thought of finding his relations in a sky parlour over offices," said George when his hunger was somewhat appeased. "He says he is a relation, doesn't he, Marge?"

"I suppose he is, and I am sure it is not much matter what he thinks; he is going away to London to-night, and probably we shall never see him again."

"I don't believe that," said Dick emphatically though in a low tone.

"You don't seem to like our illustrious cousin," exclaimed George.

"No, I do not," very decidedly.

"Well, I do. I know when I went down to stay at Langford Priory I'd have gone to smash with old Carteret and his wife if Ellis hadn't backed me up. It was wonderful the way he used to finish what I wanted to say, pick me up when I stumbled, and that was pretty often, for I was altogether in strange soundings down there."

"Yes," said Marjory thoughtfully. "It would have been quite awful at Langford if Mr. Ellis had not been one of the party."

No one spoke for a few moments after this, until Dick suddenly changed the subject by observing :

"I have not heard from Brand for two or three days. I don't know what he can be about ; he ought to be doing his work here."

"When is he coming ?" asked Marjory.

"I do not know exactly. There are some letters for him, and I am not quite sure where to send them. I wish he would come back."

Soon after Dick rose to leave them, the cloud which hung over him all the evening not yet dispersed.

"Will you come with young Rennie and me over to Hollishead to-morrow ? We are going to look at a horse his governor wants to buy. It will be a pleasant outing if the weather is fine."

"No, thank you," returned Dick promptly. "Brand may be back and I should not like to be out the way." He paused and looked very steadily at Marjory. "Are *you* going out too ?"

"Who ? me. No, of course not. The boys don't want me."

"I shall be free to-morrow about three as it is Saturday. I have a letter or two to write and then I will come on to you, if you will have me," said Dick turning to Marjory.

"Very well," but somehow the idea of his coming did not give her unmixed pleasure ; she felt in an indistinct way that she was to be called to account and she braced herself to do battle.

"I do not know what has come to Dick," cried George when they were alone. "He has turned quite crusty. I walked nearly as far as his lodgings before I met him and he seemed all right, but when we came near here I thought it was too soon to come in, and told him that Ellis had come with a message to you from Mrs. Carteret. He grew as black as night, and said he did not suppose *you* wanted us to keep away, and that Ellis was a double-dealing schemer. What did he mean, Marge ?"

"Oh, George, how can I tell ? I think Dick must have something on his mind, he has not been a bit like himself lately."

She sighed and fell into a fit of deep thought while George talked of his intended excursion next day, repeated some witticisms of Forbes Rennie and finally demanded her fullest attention to the question of a new overcoat for the winter.

* * * * *

Away in London, Brand waited with impatient patience—if such an expression may be used—for Mrs. Acland's appearance. Returning from Leighton Abbot he removed from the hotel to obscure lodgings, both for safer communication and for cheapness.

A wonderful change had come over the careless Bohemian.

The companionship of his son seemed to have transformed his nature. The simple but resolute directness of Dick's character, his broad kindly spirit, his deep sense of justice, awoke both respect and affection in the father's impressionable heart, and roused in him the desire to attract and to deserve his regard. He was deeply peni-

tent for having deserted his boy; for having believed his mother unfaithful on insufficient evidence. He had been so irritated, so outraged by her contempt—by her reckless display of rage and regret at having married him when she found her hopes of his being heir to a fine estate fade away, that he was ready to accept any doubt as positive proof against her. Now he was more embittered against her than ever for her cold-blooded cruelty to his son; he would far more readily have forgiven her attempt on his own life had he known of it. Of this, however, he was in total ignorance. He was much puzzled as to how the bottle of chloroform came to be so near him, as by no effort of memory could he recall any attempt on his own part to draw it to him or to open it—a vague kind of unacknowledged idea that his wife must have some hand in it, but how? He had asked the chamber-maid if she had seen the lady who was with him, and she had replied, “Yes, the lady was going to the stairs.” That seemed to settle the question. Well, he had escaped at all events, and now, he was quite as determined to live as old Maynard himself.

“I wonder,” he murmured to himself as he sat *tête-à-tête* with his pipe, “which of us will win in this waiting race; he is more than twenty years my senior, but then he has an untried constitution, while I have tampered with my vitality and am but the wreck of what I was. He is animated by hatred—and I am buoyed up by love. Which has the greatest staying power?”

“How shall I break it all to Dick? I dread—and long to do so. He is fond of me in a way—how will he like to know I am the father he has been taught to look upon as a dastardly deserter? Well, he shall know all he has to thank his mother for. Yet for his sake I am disposed to spare her. It will be an awful crash for that unfortunate Acland. What can he do? I wonder did she tell Blake that I had come to life again? I fancy he has been her counsellor and confidant all through. She might have been a different woman perhaps but for him! Still her heart must have been stony by nature, or she never would have treated her own son—such a son—so cruelly.”

He looked at his watch—one o’clock. Was that woman coming? It was an hour after her own appointment. If she came and they could arrange some plan of action, some system of communication, he would return to Dockborough. He pined to be once more with his son—to open his heart to him; to drop in and have a quiet chat with Marjory, of whom he had grown quite fond; to sketch her pretty brown head, or excite George’s boyish laughter by descriptions of life among the negroes of the Southern States, or the keen Yankees of the North.

Yet another hour, and Brand’s patience was exhausted; still he did not like to go out. He took his pencil and the sketch-book without which he rarely moved. He was now really industrious, working hard to maintain himself and save his annuity, to leave a

little ready money to Dick. Now, that would be taken from him. Almost unconsciously his hand drew the outline of his son's head; the occupation brought tranquility. Brand had no business out of doors—the day was damp and dull—so he drew on; then an idea for a picture crept over his brain, and he sketched that. At length the shadows of the now early-closing day gathered over him. He was surprised to think it was so late, and sat on in the dusk building castles in the air about Dick's future.

“A telegram for you, sir,” said the little servant of the house, rousing him to a sense of the troublesome present. He opened it hastily and read, “Cannot come. To-morrow at twelve, without fail.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

A BATTLE WITH FATE.

WHEN Mrs. Acland so readily promised to meet Blake, her rapid brain darted upon a plan by which she hoped to play off one enemy against another. Philip Cranston was evidently disposed to spare her for her son's sake. She would throw herself on his mercy, and interpose him between herself and her persecutor. She would tell him her difficulties, and get him to meet Blake in her stead. Then they could fight it out; whatever was the upshot she would be in no worse case than she was at present, and should Philip succeed in buying or bullying Blake, he would be easier to deal with than the coarser foe.

With this view she made the appointment with Brand (as he must still be called), and almost enjoyed the picture her fancy drew of Blake's dismay when the apparition of his former friend, whom he had so basely deceived, confronted him.

Still she could not shake off the chilly sense of dread, and reluctance to encounter her former husband; she felt as if he must, in meeting her eyes, divine that she almost succeeded in murdering him.

If indeed he could be induced now to aid her in dealing with Blake, he had been preserved to shield her. But after? How was she to get rid of him? how retain her position of lofty respectability?

Let her defeat the more immediate enemy, however, and then circumstances would guide her in dealing with the other. The existence of her son was one strong point in her favour.

So musing, she partly recovered herself, but when her husband returned to a sort of picnic dinner in their dismantled house, he was much distressed by her extreme pallor and exhausted air.

“Very glad I persuaded you to see the doctor, my dear. What hour are you to go to him?”

"At twelve. I shall go on to do a little shopping in Regent Street, get my prescription made up, and then take a cup of tea at the station, so as to be back by six or seven o'clock."

"I wish I could go down with you, but I have one or two particular appointments to-morrow."

"Oh, do not trouble about me, I am not half so ill as you imagine. I will write you a few lines after I see the doctor."

"You had better not get up to breakfast to-morrow; I want mine earlier than usual."

"Very well, dear."

Mrs. Acland breathed more freely when she heard the front door close behind her husband. Fortune still favoured her; she would start a little earlier than she had intended in order to have more time with Brand.

She gave directions to the servants who remained in the house, with her usual clearness, and was in the act of placing pencil and paper in her little handbag, when the front door bell sounded loudly. Mrs. Acland started, with a sudden prophetic dread. Then the servant came in with a small note. Mrs. Acland tore it open. It contained one line, "I must see you." No signature, nor was any needed. Neither dared she refuse.

"Tell the man to come in," she said, and shut her mouth close, determined to fight to the last.

The next moment Blake crossed the threshold, his hat in his hand, his hair a disordered tangle, rough and coarse from the attempts he had made to bleach it a lighter colour; his blue spectacles awry, his face pale and pasty.

"What brings you here?" asked Mrs. Acland in a low fierce whisper.

"The old thing, Ju—the old thing. I swear I am almost ashamed of myself. But last night I happened to turn into a place—oh, no matter where—they were playing euchre, and I took a hand just to while away an hour. I was in such wonderful luck I thought it would be a sin to stop, then the tide turned. I thought to regain what I lost, so I went on, till I hadn't a blessed rap left. I thought I'd catch you before you went to meet the governor. Just give me a sov. to keep me going till to-morrow; then you know you were to give me more cash."

"I will not give you a sou, you ruffian! not if you were to ruin me by your treachery the next moment," she returned in the same suppressed tone of bitter hatred and indignation. "It is impossible to buy safety from such as you! I give up the struggle, but I will destroy *you*! I will inform the police that you have returned to your old haunts, and you may tell your tale against me in the dock. Let me pass," she added, advancing towards him with flashing eyes and a look of desperation on her set face.

"Not to hand me over to the police if I know it," he exclaimed,

letting his hat fall and grasping her upper arm painfully hard. "How dare you defy me? You know I can——"

Mrs. Acland interrupted him with a low cry, for as she stood facing the door she saw it open abruptly, and Mr. Acland with an air of amazement entered, exclaiming, "What is the matter? Let go the lady this moment! What does he want?"

"The game's up, by——" said Blake grinding his teeth.

His voice struck Mr. Acland, who had placed himself between him and his wife, and now, looking keenly at the intruder, said in tones of almost awestruck surprise, "Good God! Why it is Blake! What—what do you want here?"

"Money!" replied Mrs. Acland, who for a moment lost her self-command, so infuriated was she by the frustration of her plans. "The coward thrust himself upon me in your absence, hoping to extract money from me by a pitiable tale, and when he found I was not to be imposed upon, he was about to use violence."

"I *was* about to exact money from her," retorted Blake, taking off his spectacles and glaring at the woman who stood to her ground so resolutely. "Money I am entitled to because I have kept her secrets and shielded her reputation. And if you are wise, *you* will make up for what she has failed to give me."

Mr. Acland gazed first at one and then the other in bewildered astonishment as if he but half understood what was going on.

"Money—secrets!" he stammered, feeling that the solid ground would crumble away next, that the end of all things was at hand. "What—what does he mean?"

Mrs. Acland was silent, nerving herself for a final effort to keep her hold upon her husband. Blake, exasperated by her scorn and defiance, cast all restraint to the winds. "I mean that I know your wife's history better than any one else! That I found a husband for her, when I began to fear she would be a drag on my own career, that she got sick of him, and nearly drove him out of his mind; that I held letters of hers which would prove what I assert; and that when I came to a smash, she bought them from me with the cash she stole from *your* safe, and laid the blame on her own son! I can swear to this, and if you give me up to the police, there is not a crooked corner of her queer life I will not turn out to the light of day! The world shall know what sort of a mother *your* children have! It is for you to judge, whether it's worth while to make me hold my tongue."

While he spoke Mrs. Acland watched her husband's face, and saw that the accusation was too monstrous to be accepted by him; she saw as by an electric flash the value of *her* word against that of a detected cheat, and when the alarmed, incredulous husband turned his eyes upon her, she met them with a proud superior smile.

"Do you believe this probable tale?" she asked. "No, I see

you do not. Yet I must insist on your hearing my version of it, before this liar's face."

"Let him begone first!" cried Mr. Acland. "I shall claim the protection of the police—let him escape if he can."

"As you will! My revelations will make fine food for the society papers."

"Hear me! I insist on your hearing me," reiterated Mrs. Acland, moistening her parched lips with her tongue, and still keeping a steady front, though she trembled with fear and anger.

"This man was the constant companion of my unfortunate husband. I tried to keep him out of our house, seeing he was an evil influence. He clung to the acquaintance, because he believed he would make money of it when my husband inherited the property which then seemed likely to come to him. He hated me, because I tried to win my husband from bad and reckless ways. He sowed dissension between us; then when I was alone, he appeared anxious to atone for the past. Finally, being in sore straits, needing money to enable me to accept the position of companion, I took a small loan from him. It was the only chance I had of securing the means of existence for my boy; this he declared I might pay back how and when I could. My one error has been keeping this hidden from you, my best, my most generous friend! Out of the allowance you give me for my personal expenses I saved enough to pay him by degrees, and the last instalment which cleared me of debt to him happened to be paid just before he disappeared. There is my story. I am ready to stand to it, in court or out of court."

There was a quiet look of deadly determination in her eyes as she fixed them on Blake, who was himself staggered by the air of truth she put on.

"Why—why did you conceal this from me?" cried Mr. Acland, greatly shaken; horrible visions of a magistrate's court, of evil reports, of slanderous paragraphs, rising before him.

"Because I shrank from distressing you, but chiefly because I feared, knowing your fine nature, that the idea of my having received help from *him*," she pointed scornfully to Blake, who was stunned by the readiness and plausibility of her defence, "might have helped him to gain a hold on you too! You know how anxious I was to get you out of his hands. Should I have ventured to act as I did between you, had that man held me in his power?"

"No, certainly not! Now you, you villain. Leave this house! And remember I will inform the authorities of this impudent attempt to extort money."

"She has the invention, the pluck of a hundred devils! Still I will tell *my* tale if I am caught; and remember if enough mud be thrown, some will stick," exclaimed Blake. "By —, I speak truth, and you will find it out one day! Anyhow, it is

more for your comfort and respectability that I should disappear, and I haven't a rap. I gambled away the five pounds *she* gave me yesterday."

"Gave you yesterday?" interrupted Mrs. Acland, with infinite scorn. "There is no limit to this man's lies! Where, and how did I give you five pounds?" then turning to her husband, "You know I had not five pounds about me? I had to ask you for money for the doctor's fee this morning."

"That proves a good deal," sneered Blake.

"Begone," cried Acland, angry, alarmed, bewildered, yet still believing in his wife. "Never let me see you again." His hand moved furtively towards his pocket. Mrs. Acland with a sudden gesture of dignified resolve seized it.

"No, Robert," she said; "you shall not give him a penny—my reputation demands that you should *not*. I can bear the brunt of his accusations. Who would believe *his* word against mine? Let him go, and do his worst. Yet I am not inhuman! Should he escape detection, and return to confess the infamous falsehood of what he dares to assert, to humble himself before the woman he has tried to ruin, I would *not* hold your hand. I would give him the chance of repentance and reform."

"There is small chance of either," said Mr. Acland. "Come, leave the house, or I will seek help you would not like."

Blake looked straight into Mrs. Acland's eyes. "Your match," he muttered, "was never created, but," with a deep curse, "you have not done with me yet."

An awful sense of deadness seized Mrs. Acland as he disappeared. She could afford to breathe, but what an abyss of danger still yawned under her feet! She had contrived to throw a plank across it—would it bear her safely to the other side? Still she had gained time! All depended on her own courage.

Strange compound of contradictions as are most natures, in this desperate pass, though hardened to the pitch of being ready to dare any crime rather than be beaten by the traitor who tried to sacrifice her, the thought of her children nearly broke her down. They were at once the evidence and support of her highly prized respectability; her feeling for the boy Herbert was the nearest approach to real affection she had ever known! She had become so accustomed to the quiet, orderly routine of an easy assured life, that the idea of its being torn from her was insupportable.

She sank exhausted into a chair, while these thoughts crowded upon her.

"He is an awful ruffian," said Mr. Acland, too much upset by the fear of scandal and gossip to think even of his precious wife. "It is perfectly frightful to think of the mischief such a fellow can do," and he began to walk up and down. "As he said, some mud is sure to stick."

"There is no danger in him, except to those he can frighten; rest assured he will be here on his knees to-morrow. I do not fear him; what I do fear is your just displeasure for bringing such annoyance on you, by my foolish attempt to spare you the humiliation of knowing that I was indebted to that wretch. Can you forgive me, Robert?"

"Yes, yes, of course—but what steps ought I to take to silence him? You were too precipitate in stopping me, when I was going to secure his silence. Imagine the terrible effect his scandalous charges would have, if made public. Our laws ought to provide some safeguard against the machinations of such a scoundrel!"

"The only chance of preservation from them is to defy them."

"But did you ever know the fellow before you married Cranston?"

"Yes, for a short time previously," she returned with unflinching readiness.

"It is well," resumed Mr. Acland, pausing in his troubled walk, "that I returned in time to protect you! On reaching the office, I found that a man I expected on very particular business was obliged to leave town, so as Cross was there I returned at once intending to go with you to the doctor's. I am appalled by this dreadful attack! The truth or falsehood of such a story is of little consequence to the scandalmongers; all *they* want is a nine days' wonder, the stigma of which will stick to you, to us, however innocent you may be," and he resumed his walk.

"It is enough for *you* to know I am innocent in order to uphold me," she returned, struck by his indifference to the shock she had sustained, compared with his somewhat cowardly fears for his loss of character through the imputation cast on hers.

"*Why* did you not tell the whole truth about that scoundrel and his loan to you?"

"It was a fatal mistake, I own; but, Robert, I am bitterly punished in seeing you turn against me in my hour of need."

"I don't," cried Mr. Acland impatiently. His hitherto infallible wife had lost her *prestige* in admitting her error, and his tone had changed. "I am of course ready to stand by you, but I wish you had not dismissed the fellow so sharply. It would be wiser to make terms with him. The whole affair is frightful, horrible."

"I should have been false to you, to my self-respect, had I permitted him to parley with you. Once give him hush money, and you bind yourself to pay a steadily increasing blackmail; the fact of paying anything would ruin your case and my reputation. You cannot believe me, Robert, or you would never dream of giving Blake 'hush money.'" She sank into a chair, and burst into tears—real tears, thankful to have an excuse for this relief. She felt her brain turning.

"Yes, I do believe you, my dear, and I am afraid you will be made seriously ill," he exclaimed, softened by her distress and reassured by her courage.

"I suppose it is too late to see Dr. Nesbitt. But you must stay in town and see him to-morrow. Telegraph to nurse that you will not return this evening; you had better lie down, and have some wine or tea, or something."

Mrs. Acland assented. How was she to get rid of her present husband? How was she to communicate with her former spouse? The toils were closing round her, her courage was failing. Supposing she succeeded in her bold defiance of Blake, nothing could avert the disclosures of Brand. He would help her to silence Blake's, but as regarded his own she had no power to silence him. Still, come what might, were he helpless in her hand to-morrow, she would not attempt his life. She was safe from detection; even *he* could have no idea whose hand had brought him so near death, and she began to see he might be more useful to her alive than dead. Her own pluck had won her a moment's breathing time, but Blake would return.

The memory of her first husband's generosity, his unselfish tenderness, the chivalry of his nature, came back to her—all that she used to despise; and something within her, which yet was not herself, seemed to say "the strongest, the most adamant cannot get through life altogether without the sympathy, the disinterested help of their fellows; were all like you, the world would be a scene of moral carnage, where the ultimate conqueror would be left to perish in his isolation." Had the husband towards whom she had been so cruelly hard been by her now, what amount of slander would have made him shrink from her! How he would have laughed the fear of gossip to scorn, if he believed in her. If she could sleep, and get a moment's respite from thought—anything to rest her overstrained nerves.

Presently Mr. Acland came into the room softly. He said that as he could do her no good he would go back to the office and clear off some letters, so as to be able, perhaps, to go out of town with her to-morrow.

"Do, dear," said Mrs. Acland. "If I feel equal to it, I will go out for a turn later; the air may do me good. Don't fret yourself; I feel sure that dreadful man will not trouble you again. Shall you consult with Mr. Cross?"

"With Mr. Cross? No; certainly not. Do you suppose I should mention such a disgraceful matter to him? Shall I telegraph to nurse?"

"No, thank you; I will do so."

Some hours later, as day closed, Mrs. Acland rose, dressed with care, ate a biscuit and took more than one glass of dry sherry, an unusual excess for her, as she was nearly a total abstainer. Then she bent her steps, which she was alarmed to

feel were somewhat unsteady, to the post office, whence she dispatched two telegrams.

* * * *

When Brand had read the telegram, he put away his drawing and took up a volume of French memoirs, into which he dipped from time to time. The light grace and keen semi-cynical observation of its pages amused him, and diverted his thoughts without costing his brain much effort. From this he was disturbed by the announcement of, "A gentleman for you, sir," while the speaker, an ordinary lodging-house slavey, handed him a card: "Captain Hugh Cranston, R.N., Junior United Service Club."

"Show him in by all means—— Glad to see you. How did you find me out?"

"By inquiring at Charing Cross, where you said you were staying. I am not very satisfied with the state of things, and I thought I should like to have a talk with you," said Captain Cranston, drawing a chair beside the table which held Brand's book and lamp. "I suppose you have no objection?"

"No, I am glad to see you. We were good friends enough in the old times—how long ago—some twenty-five years?"

"Yes, quite that. But you look as if it were longer, Philip."

"I daresay I do. I have led a very different life from yours. But there is not much to be gained by looking back. Tell me, how did you leave that poor old fellow, our uncle?"

"In a curious feverish excited state, determined to live and yet acting as if he wanted to kill himself—eating and drinking what is really distasteful, and going out in all weathers by way of hardening himself. I wish he was not so prejudiced against you."

"So do I; and I fancy it is half envy because I, with all my evil doings and shortcomings, have a living thriving son, and his has been wrenched from him."

"He was always a man of strong, unreasonable prejudices, and physical weakness seems to have increased them. First, I want to tell you that he has had his solicitor down to Leighton Abbot's, and made a will bequeathing me all he can. His savings have been very considerable. This alone, should you outlive him, will make me richer than I ever expected or indeed cared to be. Now I want to know what you are going to do about your boy. If he is to inherit this fine property, he ought to be prepared for it in some way. I should like to see him. What are your plans and views?"

"I have none," returned Brand slowly; "and I do not feel disposed to make any. Dick is well educated, a great deal better than the generality of heirs. He has full employment in a life he enjoys; I hesitate to disturb him. He has more than usual firmness of character, but we have both seen so many men, men full of promise, ruined by the shifting lights of delusive expecta-

tions, that I would rather spare him that trial. I may die before Maynard, you may marry. He had better stick to his trade."

"I do not think there is a more confirmed bachelor in Europe than I am," said Captain Cranston smiling. "I should feel ashamed were I to hold back a helping hand from my young kinsman or yourself; and I fancy—though you have certainly made mistakes—that you have hard lines generally. I do not want to be intrusive, but don't you think that you ought to tell your son who you are? He ought not to be kept in the dark any longer."

"I know that. My difficulty is the mother. I want to spare her as much as I can—though I do not know that she particularly deserves consideration at my hands. Still, I wronged her, undoubtedly. I have been meditating how I shall break the painful news to that unlucky Acland. He may wish her to divorce me in order to marry her himself, to which proceeding I shall of course offer no opposition. It is a most unfortunate affair for their children, and I now regret I did not avow my existence three years ago. She implored me to keep it dark, and I then thought it was the best thing I could do for all parties. Who could foresee the turn affairs would take!"

"Who indeed! No doubt all deviation from the straight and open road is fatal, but I believe you acted to the best of your judgment; now I am convinced your only course is to make a clean breast of it to both Acland and your son. It is a curious complication."

"You are right, yet I half dread opening the matter to Dick. He is fond of me now. If I see him shrink from me I could not bear it. I never thought I could love any creature as I love that lad."

"I think he will see you are more sinned against than sinning. How old is he?"

"Three-and-twenty. His mother docked him of a year, but he is twenty-three, all told. I have been reflecting that I might tell him my story in a letter and then talk matters over with him."

"Perhaps it might be the best plan, but lose no time either in writing or opening the matter to Mr. Acland. You owe him what reparation you can make."

"I know that. The day after to-morrow I will make some decisive move."

"I suppose Maynard will fulfil his threat to stop your annuity."

"I have no doubt he will. In fact, having broken the conditions, I could not with decency accept it. The worst of it is, one cannot stir in any direction, where law is concerned, without putting your hand in your pocket!"

"No doubt! Well, Philip, this is such a curious case—so desperately hard on your unoffending son—that I am willing to assist you."

"And for *his* sake I am willing to accept your assistance. I had better consult some sound lawyer before communicating with Acland. Unlucky devil! I wonder if he will stick to her."

"Hard to say."

"As soon as I have had advice I will let you know."

After a little more desultory talk Captain Cranston rose to say good-bye.

"You have done me a real service by your visit," said Brand, shaking hands with him warmly. "You were always a good fellow, but I never expected you to stand to me like this! Whether I live or die you will be a friend to Dick. You two will be sure to be friends."

When he had striven to eat some dinner and settled himself to his solitary evening, he set forth pen and paper determined to pour out his confession to his son. He wrote and tore up what he had written, over and over again, till midnight found him still struggling with his painful task.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"A DISCOVERY."

MARJORY had various errands out of doors the day following the visit of Ellis, and by the time the short autumnal day had begun to close she was somewhat tired and glad to sit down. There was a tinge of uneasiness in her anticipated interview with Dick. Yet on the whole, pleasure predominated. He was generally so reasonable that she felt no doubt a little confidential conversation would make them friends again, as they used to be. He had not been himself of late, but never so decidedly cross as he was yesterday. Ellis always had an irritating effect upon him. So thought Marjory as she arranged her hair and tied a knot of soft crimson ribbon round her throat to brighten her grey gown.

Then she made up the fire, drew the sofa beside it and regulated the lamp. These preparations made, she stood in deep thought, one neat little foot on the fender; the firelight dancing on her nut-brown hair and shining in her wide-opened, speculative eyes, as they gazed far away into the dim future.

Though she expected him, Marjory was obliged to collect her thoughts with some slight effort when Dick came in.

"It is a sharp, dull evening," was his first, not very original remark. "When do you think George will return?"

"Not for some time yet." There was a pause. Marjory sat down by the table, drew her work basket to her, and began to darn a pair of George's socks very steadily. Dick watched her for a moment or two in silence as he still stood on the hearthrug.

"What lots of socks you must have darned, Marjory," he said

at length. "I remember your first bit of friendliness to me was offering to darn mine! What ages ago it seems."

"Yes! and with your usual plain speaking you told me I did not do them well." She gave him an arch upward glance.

"Sometimes you did not," he returned laughing, and showing the fine white teeth under his thick soft golden-brown moustaches. "I don't think you are as touchy as you used to be, Marge." Then his face grew very grave and he did not speak again.

It was some time since he had called her by the old familiar diminutive of her name and it thrilled her with a sad pleasure, yet it was difficult to break the silence. What had she better say? She knew they were both thinking of a subject they half feared to begin; finally with a sudden impulse Marjory dashed into it. "Well, Dick, if I have grown better tempered I think you have grown worse; you have been rather cross lately, and last night you looked at *me* as if you could send me to a penitentiary. I did not deserve it." Her colour rose and her lips trembled as she spoke.

"Perhaps not," he returned gloomily, and he threw himself on the sofa opposite to her, leaning his elbow on the top and resting his head on his hand; "it set me mad to think of your sending George off, in order to give that fellow Ellis a chance of talking with you alone."

"But *I* did not send George away—Mr. Ellis did! You know, having kept the secret from George, I could not contradict him—Mr. Ellis, I mean—when he said he had a private message from Aunt Carteret. You don't suppose *I* wanted to talk to him?"

"I don't know what to think, Marjory. I hate that fellow, I fear his influence over you; he has such a smooth tongue and wily ways, I am always in dread of his winning you yet!"

"You little know me, Dick. Why, my most earnest prayer is that I may never see his face again! When I had Aunt Carteret's letter telling me that she was sending me a present by Ralph Ellis——"

"Then you knew he was coming!" cried Dick, the colour leaving his face, his blue eyes darkening with anger as he sprang up and paced to and fro, "and you never told *me*! never consulted with me how to avoid him! This does not agree with what you say about wishing never to see him again!"

"Yet I tell you simple truth when I say so," cried Marjory. "I scarcely ever have a word alone with you; I cannot speak before George, and I had an odd stupid hesitation about mentioning that letter."

"But you could have sent me a line! a word would have brought me to you! I cannot tell you the pang it gives me to think of your being alone with that double-dealing villain, who was so nearly your husband. Why did you not send for me, Marjory?"

"I don't know, exactly ; but," her voice grew unsteady, "now that you are, naturally enough, taken up with the girl you love, you do not, of course, care to be troubled, so much at least, with your sister."

"My sister!" repeated Dick laughing harshly, and he resumed his position on the sofa. "You have no right to say that."

"I assure you I am glad I *did* see Mr. Ellis alone, for it gave him an opportunity of saying that he would not marry me if he could."

"He said that!" cried Dick in great surprise.

"Yes! he did indeed, and I believe him. I know he dislikes me now, though he can't help worrying; all he wants is to punish me by preventing me from marrying any one else, and that is no punishment; for you know, Dick, I could never even wish to marry any one."

Dick did not answer immediately. "Not now perhaps, Marge, but there are a good many years of youth before you, and—and some one may make you think differently. But at any rate that fellow has given you back the promise he extracted from you."

"I do not think he could release me more completely than by telling me he would not marry me if he could."

"It's amazing!" murmured Dick.

"I cannot think it is! I am sure if I were Mr. Ellis, I should hate the sight of Marjory Acland!"

There was a short pause; then Marjory said softly, "Now do you understand me, Dick? and can you spare me a little brotherly affection from your black-eyed darling?"

"No!" he returned abruptly, his eyes growing dreamy and gloomy. "I cannot spare a heart-throb—a thought of love from the girl who has entered into my soul and dwells there. Let me tell you how I love her: she is always before me, when I work, when I sleep—oh, it is best when I sleep, for then she comes and bends over me and kisses my brow, and for a minute or two of Heaven I feel she loves me. Then I think how the hope of having her with me always would give me power and genius; of the delight of keeping all troubles and griefs from her, of even bearing with her when she is vexed, and winning her to reason; for the girl I love is no angel, but a bright vivid creature not yet come to the full power of her fine nature; and I even dream of growing old with her, of resting with her, after we have borne the burden and heat of the day together."

There was a wonderful music in the low deep tones of his voice, that wrung Marjory's heart with grief to think what a treasure had been laid at the feet of another; she could not speak.

"Do you think me a sentimental fool, Marge?" he asked with a quiet smile.

"Indeed—indeed I do not," she exclaimed, with difficulty hold-

ing back her tears. "I only hope and pray that you may be happy with the woman you love so well."

"I do not think I shall, Marge!"

"Why? Do tell me more about her, Dick. Does she love you?"

"Ah! no, I must not think of it. Now, Marge, I will not tease you about Ellis any more. Let us be fast friends; you feel for me so kindly that I am ashamed of being ill-tempered and jealous; besides I ought to govern myself better! Do you forgive me, Marge?"

"Oh yes, Dick! I am never happy when I am out with you!"

"Then shake hands upon it." He rose and took her hand, drawing her from her chair till she stood beside him. "There was a time," he went on huskily, "when we made friends with a kiss; why do you shrink from me now, Marge?"

"But I do not," she said, feeling strangely moved and even frightened, yet resolved to accept his kiss as from a brother. He bent down, he nearly touched her lips, then he suddenly drew back and almost pushed her from him, stepping back. "It is no use," he exclaimed brokenly; "I dare not kiss you. It would not be honest; I cannot keep back the words even though I distress and shock you. You are no sister of mine, Marge. I want more than a sister's love from you; I do not suppose I ever loved you as men love their sisters; I never remember the day when you had not the power—first to wound, and then to charm me. I never had any one to love but you, and no one else ever can be to me what you are—perhaps you have perceived this, and turn from it as strange and unnatural, considering the relations between us. I always felt you were dear to me, but *how* dear I never knew till that day you threw yourself into my arms, and told me you had escaped from Ellis; since that it has been almost as much pain as pleasure to be with you. I sometimes fancy that you have divined my feeling, for you are changed—certainly changed. Now I cannot bear the pain of being with you, yet divided from you; I will not offend you more; I will keep away. I invented the dark-eyed girl that I might relieve my heart by confessing the love I had for *you*! Marge, dear Marge! there is no wrong in what I feel, only you have been so accustomed to look on me as a brother, a somewhat uncouth brother, that no doubt you will again consider me a monster. Tell me that you will forgive me this outbreak; I will never offend again."

Marjory had stood quite still with wide-opened alarmed eyes which slowly drooped, her hands clasped and pressed against her bosom, giddy with the intoxicating delight his words excited. When he paused, her hands unclasped themselves to hide her face; she could not speak. Dick Cranston misinterpreted her gesture, her silence.

"I am afraid it is all over with me in your estimation, Marge.

I will leave you. Perhaps some day when you fall in love yourself, you will be able better to understand and pardon me ;” he walked to the door, he put his hand on the lock.

Then she cried out to him, “Do not go, Dick, stay—stay with me.”

“It is only pain to us both, Marge ; I know your kind heart, and I rage against myself for having burst the bonds which ought to have held me. Good-bye.”

“No, Dick ! I will not let you go,” she flew to him and clasped her arms round one of his, pressing her cheek against it and murmuring, “I wish you to stay with me always, Dick—always.”

“But, Marge, if you knew the struggle—the——”

“Then don’t struggle ! Oh ! Dick, don’t you understand me !” her left arm stole across his chest to his shoulder ; she leant against him till he could feel the throbbing of her heart.

“Why, Marge ! Good God—is it possible you could—you do love me ! I dare not hope it, Marge ;” then as she still clung to him, he drew her back near the lamp, holding her from him to gaze into her face. “Speak !” he said hoarsely, “I cannot bear this doubt another moment.”

“Dear, dear Dick !” the loving tenderness of her voice told him more eloquently than the most abundant speech how dear he was. A great light of pride and joy came to his eyes ; he lifted his head elated for an instant, then pressing her close to his heart, bent down to seek the soft quivering lips so frankly given to his passionate kisses.

“But I cannot believe it,” he cried. “Marge, my darling, how did you come to love so uncouth a fellow as I am ?”

“I don’t know,” she murmured ; “but I somehow grew fond of you, and that I believe was the reason I could not bring myself to marry Mr. Ellis, but I did not know it, till—till you told me that frightful story about your black-eyed young lady, sir !” she tried to assume a playful tone, though her voice trembled, as she strove to withdraw from his embrace.

“Not yet !” he pleaded, holding her fast yet gently : “I am only able to believe the reality of my joy while I have you in my arms ! Can life be the same thing it was ten minutes ago ? I feel as if the world was under my feet. And you believed my transparent invention ? It was a blessed thought, if it taught you something more than sisterly affection ! Yet I am ashamed of the sort of infidelity that made me profess even an imaginary devotion to black eyes—I only care for these brown ones that danced before me for many a long hour of absence. Marge, you can defy Ellis now ! You may tell him that between us he can never make mischief ! Are you sure you love me, that it is not a feeling of pity melts your heart ? It is such a tender, true heart.”

“I do not pity you at all !” said Marjory, with as good an imitation of sauciness as she could manage, considering that she was so

agitated and shaken she could hardly stand. "You are a wicked deceitful monster—a worse monster than ever; but still a very dear monster," she ended with a sob, that would not be suppressed.

"Now you must let me go, Dick—indeed you must."

"Then give me another kiss, my darling! When your sweet mouth is against mine I know you love me!"

The bewildering delight this discovery of each other's hidden treasure bestowed, was too exciting to permit of much distinct or continuous conversation. Yet time flew so fast that both were amazed when George appeared, followed, to their annoyance, by Forbes Rennie.

"Give us some tea, Marge, will you? We have had a long drive since dinner."

"Sorry to give you the trouble, Miss Acland."

Of course Marjory was quite ready to be troubled; so tea was prepared with some confusion and many mistakes, which seemed rather unaccountable to George, who had a high opinion of his sister's handiness and capability. Dick was very helpful, and had his wits considerably more about him than Marjory expected. He talked and laughed, and attracted the attention of the new arrivals to himself, till George exclaimed, "Why, Dick, you are quite another man to-night. Have you come into a fortune?"

"Not exactly," with a happy laugh, "but I have made a splendid find."

"How? where? Tell us all about it."

"If I were you, George, I'd cry 'Halves' as Scotch boys do. Eh, Mr. Cranston?"

"No one shall share *my* treasure trove," returned Dick.

"Well—but what is it?"

"Oh! I will tell you by and by."

Possibly the reply suggested to Forbes Rennie the wisdom of leaving them alone to discuss family matters.

When he was gone, and George had returned from seeing him off the premises, he indulged in the brief but leading question, "What's up?"

"We three must have no secrets," said Dick, laying his hand on George's shoulder. "Prepare for a shock. Marge has promised to marry me."

"Good Lord! but it—it's not lawful," cried George in dismay.

"Yes, it is. Marge and myself are in no way related, or even connected; there is no blood tie between us."

A few more exclamations and explanations, then George sat down stunned. "What a fury the governor and your mother will be in," he said.

"I don't think so," remarked Marjory, coming behind his chair and resting her arm round his neck. "They do not much care what becomes of us. We must fight for our own hand. My father always liked Dick."

"Why, you haven't a rap between you."

"I have no fear of the future," returned Dick; "but it will be an awfully long time before I can make a home fit for Marjory."

"Perhaps that is all the better," said Marjory smiling. "You know we are both 'owre young to marry yet.'"

"I do not see that, but at any rate I have something to live for and work for now!" cried Dick.

"Well, the ways of women are past finding out—to think of your ever consenting to marry the 'monster,'" said George solemnly.

"And on the first time of asking too," said Marjory with a bright blush and saucy look.

"What on earth will Brand say?"

"Ah! Brand, I had forgotten him—more shame for me. He will be enchanted; he adores Marge. Marge, we must always look after Brand."

"So the upshot will be I shall have to live alone."

"Not for a long time, dear old Geordie!"

"I'll tell you what it is, I'll marry some one myself."

"Who?" cried Marjory and Dick together.

"Mary Rennie!" The newly engaged pair laughed heartily, and soon after at Marjory's command Dick withdrew.

* * * * *

The letter which had cost Brand so much pain and difficulty to write, he took care to post so that it might reach his son when he returned from his daily work, that he might have the evening and night to think over it, and compose himself before he went forth again to his allotted task.

Dick, who was all impatience to join Marjory and George as had been arranged, was almost vexed to find so thick a letter awaiting him. It would take half-an-hour to read it, he thought; then with quick self-condemnation, he thought how ungrateful it was to begrudge half-an-hour to his friend and benefactor.

The first words riveted his attention. With eager eye and quickened pulse he hurried to the end, only to recommence and read it through more deliberately. The history was clearly and dispassionately given; but little was said of the deceit practised by the writer's unscrupulous wife, nor was any mention made of the inheritance which might fall to him. Brand dwelt much on the strong temptation to leave his wife and son undisturbed in the certain and respectable position in which he found them. "I know," he added, "that this was not strictly honourable, but I was ill; I believed I had only a short time before me. Your mother's entreaties, and a certain promise I had given, of which more hereafter, all combined to convince me that the best and wisest course was to keep out of sight. Then came our accidental meeting; I do not suppose that it is possible for you, in the first flush of youth and manhood, to imagine the quiet happiness I found in the com-

panionship of my own son—to find that son a sympathetic friend. How bitterly I lamented the wrong I had done you, how profound the pride I felt in a character, a nature superior to my own; yet, my dear boy, I should have kept out of sight had I not found it necessary for your interests to prove that Philip Cranston was still alive. I will not now go into this matter; I long, yet dread to meet you. Can you forgive your father? If so I will come to you at once; much remains to be told and we must consult together how best to shield your unhappy mother from the effect my reappearance will have on her fortunes. For Mr. Acland I have sincere compassion; he seems to have been a kind friend to you, and the break-up of his home, the unmasking of the wife in whom he appears to have had the most absolute trust, will be terrible indeed. In her marriage with him your mother was blameless, she fully believed me dead; but her extraordinary enmity, and I believe treachery to you, I can never forgive. Write to me when you have thought over this letter.”

Dick's first clear idea when he had finished this strange outpouring was pleasure in finding his father. He remembered with warm satisfaction the remarkable attraction Brand had had for him from the first—his next, that this newly found father had been basely belied. Then what did Brand—no, his father—mean by speaking of his mother's treachery to himself. Was it the insinuation that he took the money from Mr. Acland's safe? He was always suspicious of her, in spite of his mental resistance. Still, there was a very evil quarter of an hour before them all! How would it affect Marjory? What a painful story to tell her, even though she need not hear all the details. She would always be true—that he could not doubt, but her father might strongly object to her marriage with the son of the woman had who brought so much misery and shame upon him. Still neither that, nor anything else, should prevent their spending their lives together. Marge, dear sweet saucy Marge, loved him, and this inspiring consciousness would enable him to remove mountains.

Why should cool, deliberate experience sneer at the divine folly of youth? What can life give of after triumph to compare with the boundless realm of joy and faith which a first ardent, happy love bestows? It may be but a brief possession, yet while it lasts it is real; and in hearts of the higher order even to the end the scent of the roses hangs round its memory, lending the charm of fuller comprehension to whatsoever things are pure and lovely and noble; for love informs as much as knowledge.

How glad he was to think that Marjory always liked Brand; they would get on together, and she would help him to make the rest of his life peaceful and happy. To Dick's kindly nature the idea of having a parent he could regard with sympathy and affection was delightful; it removed the sense of isolation which used, not exactly to depress him—nothing had ever shaken his

quiet self-reliance—but to make him grave, reserved, and wary. But what was to be done with Mrs. Acland?—he rarely named her “mother” in his thoughts—that was a problem beyond him. He must wait till he consulted with his father to answer the question.

He looked at his watch; it was too late to post for London that evening. He would go and see Marge, tell her and George of the wonderful disclosure he had received, and write a long letter to his friend and father before he slept.

Having made a rapid but careful toilette as became a lover, he issued forth, and a few steps from his own door ran against George.

“Why, what has brought you here?” he cried with vague uneasiness.

“I have a note for you from Marge. Mrs. Acland has met with a bad accident, and my father has desired Marge to come home immediately, for everything is at sixes and sevens. I have just seen her off by the five-fifty express for London.”

(To be concluded.)

GRANT ME A SMILE.

GRANT me a smile or a sigh! Let me see thee and touch thy hand

(For in love there is so much to yield, so little to hope or demand),
Then, perchance, I might learn from thine eyes if thy soul could
surrender mine,
If this silence more poignant than pain be the herald of love's
decline.

For I am a part of thy life, a reed that the gods have given
To fill the dark aisles of thy soul with the music and laughter of
heaven.

Wilt thou hurt me and cast me aside?—not knowing, nor caring
to know,
The span of thy future loss, the depth of my present woe.

Would my voice seem a break in the stillness, a stain on the snow
of regret,

Like a jest on thy sacred sorrow, or a crimson blood-drop set
'Mid the diamond gems of thy tears, that are pure with a holy pain,
Waking a keener remorse, renewing the ache and strain

Of a spirit at war with itself, oppressed with the haunting past,
Whose billows of failure and wrong surge back to thee full and
fast?

Am I to be numbered with these, as a temptress that lured
thee to ill,

Who sought but to gird thee with chains, and spared not her aim
to fulfil?

Nay! I, too, have suffered and wept; I have shared in thy
trouble and grief;

For the throb of my heart echoes thine, as the sway of the bough
shakes the leaf.

Can a smile wrong the dead or the living when the soul and the
thoughts are free?

Grant me this! It will cast no reflection between thy atonement
and thee.

MARIE CONNOR.

“AFTER TWO DECADES.”*

By LADY RAMSAY.

A WARM and well-lighted cheerful apartment, the freshly banked-up fire struggling bravely with the damp depression of the outer air, the shaded lamps casting a glorious glow, fairly putting to shame the lurid glare of their gaseous rivals as they timidly blinked a sickly light in the world of mist and fog of a chill November evening. Outside all was darkness and wretchedness; inside Tipton House all was light and warmth and welcome! The soft carpets, the inviting easy-chairs, the general air of comfort were all in pleasing contrast to the raw and enwrapping air without.

Mr. Lorrimer stood on the hearthrug, from time to time ominously snapping his watch; his wife placed the most comfortable arm-chair in front of the fire; the door was opened every now and again by the butler, who appeared for the ostensible purpose of settling the papers, or of poking the fire, but in reality to relieve himself in some degree of that fidgety state of mind which is engendered in the domestic breast when the dinner hour is nearing, the cook is fuming, and the expected guest has not as yet arrived!

“Train’s late, I take it,” remarked the master of the house.

“Suppose it is the fog. Then, you see, there are two miles to drive,” rejoined his wife. “I suppose William had lights. Hush! I thought I heard wheels.”

A clanging ring at the door-bell followed this remark; the horses stood steaming at the door, more from the state of atmospheric pressure, than from the length of their journey; their flanks were smoking but not heaving, and a very thick vapour enveloped their nostrils, which were certainly not distended in such a manner as to warrant the existence of the clouds of moisture circling around them. Mr. Lorrimer went to the hall door to receive his guest.

A warm greeting between the two men followed. From the drawing-room Mrs. Lorrimer could catch a few words, spoken in a rather gruff voice, and soon found herself shaking hands with Donald Brewster, her husband’s friend.

“I am so pleased to see you, you must have had a tiresome journey.”

* A fact.

"Nothing bad about it, I assure you; it's England, and that's everything, but inside is better than outside such a night as this, for certain."

"You must get thoroughly warm; take this chair," and Mrs. Lorrimer pushed it forward as she spoke. "I will put dinner off for a little, and the most hasty toilette will suffice, that is to say, if you care to even change at all."

"You are too good, Mrs. Lorrimer; I will not keep you waiting another moment; pray ring for dinner. I will be with you at the sound of the saddling bell, as we call it," and Mr. Brewster left the room.

"What a beard!" was Mrs. Lorrimer's first remark when their friend had left them."

"Rather of the 'bushy' order; not bad, for a pun on the spur of the moment! He's a good fellow that; I never had a better friend in the colony."

"Rather a rough exterior, Jack. Possibly, with a sound and smooth interior, especially about the beard—quite soft, in fact."

Donald's entrance put an end to further parley, and the trio sat down to dinner.

Over their wine, when Mrs. Lorrimer had retired, Jack Lorrimer and Donald Brewster opened out; there were so many incidents of their lives to be recalled, so many ups and downs of their colonial experiences to go over.

Fortune had smiled on the former's undertakings; he had bought "land and flocks," and by dint of steady perseverance and unflinching determination had amassed a very ample competency; in fact, had made the circumstances of Australian life the stepping stones to the attainment of the fortune which now enabled him to purchase Tipton House and grounds, and to fill a stable with hunters.

Brewster, his senior in years, had on his first arrival in the colony put him in the way of things, and stood his friend, and there was a bond of friendship thus early sealed between them, in a foreign land, which neither the lapse of years had loosened nor absence rendered less binding. Donald had indeed tasted far more of the bitter side of colonial life. In fact, in his case it had been one more of exile, and the words of a contemporary Australian poet might haply have found their application:

"Booted, and bearded, and burnt to a brick,
I loaf along the street;
I watch the ladies tripping by,
And I bless their dainty feet.
I watch them here and there,
With a bitter feeling of pain;
Ah! what wouldn't I give to touch,
A lady's hand again."

After the lapse of some twenty years, no wonder that Brewster found people and places changed. There were few of his relations

who held out welcoming hands to the almost forgotten stranger. The prattling children who had erstwhile climbed Uncle Donald's knee were now married and settled, with new homes, new interests of their own; or again, some of them might be lying quietly sleeping under the mossy hallowed turf beneath the shadow of the dark yew trees, whose dense and permanent shade were amongst some of the first recollections of the wanderer's home. So no wonder that, after this gap of time, over which so many new and strange bridges had been thrown, so many of the old ones had fallen and crumbled in the dust, he came to renew his past friendship, to claim his greatest boon, a warm welcome and a shake of the hand, born of heartfelt gladness, from the companion of many lonely hours, the sharer of many hard roughings, the sympathizer in many a trial and disappointment. At this moment England was centred in Huntshire, and Huntshire was absorbed in Tipton; all men were but as one—Jack Lorrimer; all women but as Ethel, Jack Lorrimer's spouse!

"Fond of the old sport as ever, I see" remarked Brewster, pausing on his way from the dining-room to look at a certain collection of hunting crops and some trophies of the chase, which, in company with divers well-executed portraits of favourite hunters, adorned the walls.

"We're in good-enough quarters here for the indulging of it," answered his friend, "and for a couple of seasons I carried the horn myself; jelly dogs, you know! Ethel will have tea waiting; this subject we will continue in the drawing-room!"

Mrs. Lorrimer sat down to the piano, and her rich voice trilled forth a well-known air from one of the latest operas. Brewster sat leaning forward over the fire, his head between his hands. Here was civilization and refinement; how far away this evening the Antipodes seemed to him to be! When she had finished, the sporting element again entered into the conversation.

"The Gadthorpe hounds meet within distance on Wednesday, and thinking you'd like just to ride out and take a look at them I secured you a mount, old fellow. What with a thorn in one of their knees, and an overreach, to say nothing of a blistered throat, my own corks are not as much up to the mark as usual. But next week you shall choose, I hope, from the stable, after a ride, and poke about on Wednesday on one of Mr. French's gees."

"I haven't hunted, Lorrimer, let me see, for how long? 'Pon my soul, I don't believe I have seen a fox found since, I'm afraid to say when! Kangaroo and wallaby have done duty occasionally, but over the pack of dappled beauties for many a long year my ken has never cast. The old fire never dies, they say:

"We have seen a run together
When the hounds run far and fast,
We have hearkened by each other
To the huntsman's cheering blast,

How gay they bustled round him,
How gallantly they found him,
How stealthily they wound him
O'er each brake and woody dell."

"Hunting again!" broke in Mrs. Lorrimer, "I must set that to music! What time for breakfast to-morrow morning, Jack?"

"Any time; to-morrow's a bye day with me and Mr. Brewster too; Wednesday we shall hope to pursue; so you shall lionize him about the place, Ethel, and give those ponies of yours a turn, or they will be pulling like mad when you get to the meet at Rimington."

"I think I can hold them! Good-night, Mr. Brewster; as Jack says, breakfast is any time, but our nominal hour on non-hunting mornings is half-past nine," and Mrs. Lorrimer retired.

The next day was spent in going round the stables, and Donald Brewster was taken a turn by his hostess in her pony carriage, in the opposite direction to where the hounds would be on the day following, as she wished to give him some idea of the country, and to show him the features of the immediate neighbourhood, the principal points being familiarized to her in relation to the "Gadthorpe" hunt.

An immense pile of building was the master's house and stables, and farther down the kennels. A certain clump of fir trees, with a wayside inn hard by, was a favourite meet, and the point where three roads met Mrs. Lorrimer assured her companion was one of the best fixtures in Mr. Rastall's country.

Wednesday dawned, as far as the atmospheric aspect and the state of the elements predicted, full of hope for the fox-hunter, a grey still morning, the wind, what there was of it, softly blowing from the south—a morning on which, to quote the saying of an octogenarian Nimrod, "the goutiest and the oldest must fain follow with the boldest," a morning on which

"A hound with even half a nose
Might surely with its quarry close."

Mrs. Lorrimer started before the men-kind, as she had to make a short detour to pick up a friend whom she was going to drive to the meet, and Jack and his friend were waiting for the dog-cart. A half smile crossed the countenance of the former as he contemplated the somewhat curious get-up of the aborigine. His nether limbs were encased in buff-coloured cords, which lost themselves in high butcher boots, a coat of a pepper-and-salt mixture which had evidently been not unfrequently under the scorching rays of the sun of the Antipodes, and had suffered accordingly, a hat which more than answered the purpose for which it was intended, namely, that of covering the head, as it descended in a threateningly extinguishing fashion, and but for the singularly remarkable length of his beard would almost have quashed the likeness out of its wearer.

“Must have some spurs, Jack, old fellow; let’s have a look at these,” and Donald began to possess himself of a pair of punishers, which his host seldom had occasion to use, but which he dubbed as “awakeners.”

Jack didn’t feel altogether comfortable in his mind. Did Donald, then, mean “going,” and in that garb? A quiet ride and a quiet get-up were what he had settled for him in his own mind. He hadn’t the heart to tell him that nothing in Mr. French’s stable would require a spur, or that a black Melton and buckskins were more *en règle* for the Gadthorpe. However, there was no time to be lost. The cart was at the door, and after encasing themselves in their ulsters, they were soon trotting along in the direction of the morning’s tryst. From all sides of the country the hunting contingent was mustering, led horses, men on cantering hacks, farmers on hunters, farmers on ponies, small boys with attendant grooms, boys of a larger growth, who were still under the fostering care of Alma Mater, some few ladies who were merely riding to the meet, for the majority of the fair sex who rode in the Gadthorpe country mounted the livery, and held their own across it in a manner well calculated to score honours with those of the sterner sex. The master of Brigworth House, a residence famed for its owner’s sporting propensities, tooled his handy team, the coach covered with a posse of sportsmen bold and true; and following in the wake with other conveyances were some half dozen pony-carts, driven by their fair occupants, whose mounts awaited them at the covert side. Then there were whole families, whose hearts were in the chase, from the parents on their hunters to the small fry on their diminutive ponies.

And now the rendezvous is reached. A line of carriages of various sorts and kinds fill up the side of the road; servants are busy with the girths and the stirrup-leathers; their masters are emerging from their ulsters and aprons in all the glory of pink and pipeclay, hands are shaken, greetings passed, and the busy scene is shifting into position for the real business of the day. For this is no lawn meet and breakfast day, when half the morning is lounged away, with possibly the sure find of a fox hard by, but not the chance assured of a good day’s sport to follow. No! Rimington fixture portends a useful day, indeed, to hounds and horses, too. Donald Brewster’s spirits rose as the Gadthorpe pack came in view—the huntsman, Will Pike, as good a man as ever cheered a hound, and the whips mounted to perfection; as well they might be, considering the purse and the person of the master, for was not the sport of kings the one thing next his heart, after his wife, who shared with him the pleasures of the chase, and moreover, a rare enough quality in a woman, knew to a nicety the qualities and qualifications of every hound in the pack. How few of us do! Sufficient that they are there, and that Nature has appointed them a share

in the day's fun, thanks to the peculiar formation of their nasal organs. How few, comparatively speaking, of the men who go straight and ride to hounds ever take a keen interest in the real hunting powers of the pack; so long as their noses are down it is all right, but the instant they are at fault, apart from the master, *bien entendu*, and the huntsman, the appreciation and applause, albeit so richly merited for picking up a cold or working out a stale line, if it rested on the majority of the followers of the pack, would be but scant and faint indeed!

The Gadthorpes were celebrities. To quote Somerville's stanzas:

" Their rush-grown tails
O'er their broad backs bend in ample arch,
On shoulders clean, upright and firm they stand.
Their round cat feet, straight hams, and widespread thighs
Low drooping chests, confess their speed,
Their strength, their wind, or on the steepy hill
Or far extended plain."

A goodly sight, with the master in their midst, and some of the best men in Huntshire, well mounted, "speed and action all combined," awaiting the signal to make a move, and *place aux dames*, for some of them go right well from find to finish. Note, too, the lady on the big bay, for she requires no pilot, and can rely on her own judgment in the selection of an animal good alike in "points and practice," unmindful of the crabblings of a vet. or the blandishments of a dealer.

"Who, in the name of fortune, is the strange man out with the hat?" queried Sir John Saunders, who had hunted with the Gadthorpe for more seasons than his well-preserved appearance would warrant.

"Or the beard," added the Reverend Stiles, the muscular Christian, as he was known in Huntshire.

"Haw—haw, most peculiaw," sniffed that young lordling the Earl of Toppington; "shouldn't think he ought to be out; might frighten the fox, you know, haw, haw!"

"Poole ain't his cutter, and he don't hang a good boot. He drove up with Lorrimer," rejoined Sir John. "Well, a Rimington day'll find him out; we'll see what stuff he's made of."

Meanwhile a dissertation had been going on between Jack Lorrimer and the man who had brought on the horse from Mr. French's stables for his friend to ride.

"What made you bring that pulling brute? It's the horse, surely, that French only had over last week from Ireland. Look here, I positively said I wanted something quiet for a friend of mine to ride about and take a look at the hounds."

"They was all ordered, sir, for hunting, and to go with Mr. Bates's harriers, and thinking as it was a friend of yours, sir, who may be a rider, like yourself, sir——" and here the man gave a half nod over his shoulder at Mr. Lorrimer.

"That's no business of yours. Confound it all, what's to be done? Brewster, old man," turning to where Donald stood, "this fiend will tire you to death after your long hunting interregnum. Take my horse, he's confidential and well-mannered, and I'll ride this brute."

"I couldn't think of it, Jack. Spoil your sport! Not on any account. I'll take my chance and see how he gets on. It will be but odds as to which is cooked first—me or the gee!"

"You'll find the Rake can go, sir," said his attendant.

Jack Lorrimer and his friend had taken stock of the Rake. A big-boned dark-brown, well-topped horse, standing some sixteen hands, a deep shoulder and good forehand, plenty in front of you, a long, lean head, no mouth apparently from the weight of iron in his jaws, an eye which showed the white of its ball, open quarters, ragged hips, hocks fairly let down, but a lack of timber below the knee—a fine stamp of a horse which, had the latter defect not existed, might have stood at his three figures any Monday at Tattersall's, but overwork in his youth, and knocking about over steeplechase courses, had added to the deficiency and told their tale.

"He's bound to gallop," remarked Donald, "and I dare say can fly his fences." And so saying he mounted the Rake, whilst the man from French's whispered in a confidential manner:

"Whatever you do, sir, let him go. If you don't give him his head he'll take it."

Mr. Rastall never allowed more law than was necessary. A keeper was conversing with the huntsman, and as the latter bent down over his saddle to listen to what he had to impart a meaning smile spread over his countenance. A consultation with the master, and Tangley Brake was the order of the day; about a mile and a half's trot from the meet. It was a small covert which lay on the south side of a slope, but not one of the accustomed draws from Rimington. So opined Lord Toppington when Will Pike was about to throw in his hounds.

"Such rot, I call it, wasting the time coming here instead of trying Piper's Gorse; never a fox this side"—in his heart of hearts much that young nobleman cared. "Quiet, you brute, will you?" as his horse gave signs of a buck and a squeak.

All was still save the brushing sound of the hounds, as they were busy in the low underwood. Hush! what's that? a whimper! Was it already in the vulpine mind to

"Hear a voice you cannot hear,
Which says I must not stay;
To see a hand you cannot see,
Which beckons me away."

The Rake was standing straight up, evidently expecting with impatience to see the starter's flag drop, and fretting to get away

from his horses. Not that this unexpected manœuvre on his part in the least disconcerted his rider, accustomed as he was to the vagaries of the buck-jumping Australians. He did not even speak to him, for all ears were strained to catch the "note of hound," and all eyes were turned to the corner of the covert where the fox was bound to break. A giving of tongue, the beauties crashing through the wood, a hat up in the air, then the welcome "gone away," and men sat down to ride. Viewed over the hill side, hounds noses well down, a scent breast high, you might have covered them; and a fair line of fencing before you. The foremost men were in their place. It was a racing start; to get to hounds and keep with them on such a day was a pretty fair test of pace and condition.

The master's chestnut was laying himself out to gallop, and Jack Lorrimer congratulated himself that the best in his stable was fit to come.

Down the slope, away for Five Fields, an ugly post and rail crossing the meadow. How some topped it, some rapped it, and others shirked it!

Donald had not attempted to pull his horse into his stride. To sit on his back and to trust to Providence was all that he could do.

The Rake took the bit in his teeth and tore to the front. They were in the stone-wall country, a feature of some parts of the western counties—loose walls, with now and again a rough coping at the top, varying in height from three to five feet. The regular wold horses got well under them and jumped them clean. It was the prettiest sight possible to see some going so steadily at them and clearing them with the neatness and bound of a deer.

Not so the Rake; he was slashing away at every obstacle, be it wall or fence, at the rate of fifty thousand miles an hour.

"Makes one's blood run cold," jerked out Lord Toppington, as he made for a gap.

Hounds were running like steam. "What matters it," thought Donald, "what line he takes; we're in it, by Jove we are!"

A lovely line of walls lay in front, a bit of plough to jump out of, and then a stretch of sward.

"I see'd him," shouted a plough boy.

"Forrard, beauties," responded Will. They needed no encouragement; flashing forward with a burning scent, the field were galloping as fast as their horses could lay legs to the ground.

Men's eyes were fixed between their horses' ears, their teeth were set with a gravity and determination becoming the occasion. Elated but calm, cheered but not excited, the true sportsman has a world of enjoyment within him. It may indeed be truly said that the exhilaration of a good run is the elixir of life.

Reynard knew his point, and crossing the road at the top of the last big grass field, he bent to the left, as if making for the

coppice, but here he did not deign to ponder ; the hounds took it through and were as on good terms with him as ever.

"He can't be taking us down to Selsey, surely," remarked a farmer on a big bony roan. "Twenty minutes' more of this and there'll be bellows to mend."

Till now the hounds had never been for one second at fault, a white mass on the hill yonder, far ahead ; ten minutes' more galloping and the pace visibly slackened.

Why, ah ! why were not those erring sheep penned in safety ? A busy working of the hounds, a panting and a heaving of the horses' sides, Will Pike encouraging and admonishing the beauties, a deep note, "Rattler has it ; on to him then," the music taken up and "forrard away."

Jack and his friend were side by side.

"If we have any luck we shall get into the Vale ; this is a good traveller and no mistake."

"And this is a game 'un under me ; he'll go till he drops."

The spire of Katling Church was just in sight, and soon down the village street hounds and horsemen dashed ; the pack hung for a few moments round some old disused buildings, but scrambling over a fence off the road they struck the line across the water meadows, those meadows so familiar to the followers of the Gadthorpe Hunt.

Some ugly fences, stiff and wattled, at which there was some grief, for the take off was deep, and the landing boggy, and a cheerful double marked the boundary of this side of the Sluther. Now the Sluther was no brook or stream, which it was quite possible to clear, or at worst to flounder into and scramble out, but a slow running river, *pur et simple*, quite unjumpable, a mill bridge and a ford being the only means of circumventing the obstacle. Trying enough when hounds were running to have to wait and take your turn at such a narrow passage.

"I see them, I see them," called out Donald Brewster to Jack Lorrimer, as they negotiated the road fence, which landed them in Sluther meadows, and the streak of water came in view.

"The ford's to the left," shouted Jack, seeing his friend stick his heels into his horse's sides. "Follow me, you can't get over the Sluther ; ford's to the left !"

"They're up the other side, by Jove they are ! Must have it, old fellow ! Here goes !" and Brewster crammed his hat still farther on his head and sent the Rake slap at the water. To turn his head was not in his equine creed any more than it was in the heart of his rider. Down he raced, and taking off with undue extravagance, he landed, save the mark, well up to his chest in the middle of the stream ! It was the work of a second for Donald to press him with his thighs and rouse him to action with the "awakeners." The Rake gave a bound and a plunge, and springing from his hocks, he jumped out of the sluggish water, and

covered the opposite bank, as he this time landed on terra-firma. Such saturated, reeking objects as they were, Brewster and the Rake were the only man and horse with hounds for the next field. Will Pike and the rest made up the time lost at the ford as best they could, and beheld the almost uncanny spectacle of the lone and dripping horseman.

"Where did he get over?" was the general question.

"He jumped the Sluther, jumped it clean in and clean out," answered one of the whips, "the first time that's been done, and the last, too, I should say."

Hounds were turning and feathering up the hedgerow, a sheep-dog had crossed the line; the huntsman left them to work it out, and Vengeance was the first to pick it up. The fox had gained upon them, and they soon settled down on his line, but the field were not so close at their sterns, and were lying back, some of them, now that the cream of the country had been crossed. It was the roughest bit they were coming to—dingles and banks, and a thick bit of wood, which was evidently the destination of the stout fox, which had afforded such a good morning's sport. Up and down they scurried, Jack and his friend all there, and Reynard was seen struggling along the far end of Dingley Bottom. A too-too from Will's horn, and down came the pack over the rough and stubby bank, scrambling over the rails which cut them off at one corner of the dingle, whilst the field rode down the ruddy ride, and emerged into the open to see their fox give yet another chase, as he ran for Tarley Wood and his life! But hounds were pressing him close; a few more strides, some twisting and turning, and old "Rasper" signed his death-warrant just within reach of sanctuary—the Warton Earths. It was a case of Who-whoop! The pack deserved their fox, as good a one as had ever stood up before them. There were not more than a dozen up at the finish, and the most notable figure in the group was Donald Brewster.

"Forty minutes," remarked the master, looking at his watch and with his usual urbanity adding that "he hoped Mr. Brewster had enjoyed the gallop," and complimenting him on the original manner in which he had negotiated the Sluther!

Whilst the obsequies were being performed and the stragglers were turning up, the Rake kept resting first one leg, then another, evidencing the fact that he had had about enough. The master presently mounted his second horse, and bidding adieu to Mr. Lorrimer and his friend, trotted off to draw towards home.

At the end of the day, as the men were riding home in knots together, and the topic was the Rimington run, not a few recalled the presence of the stranger whom Jack Lorrimer had introduced to the field.

"Brewster or Bruiser, what's his name?"

"That lunatic at large—haw—who rode—haw—at the Sluther," said Lord Toppington.

"At it, into it, and out of it," responded Sir John. "Topsy, my boy, next time hounds run over the water meadows suppose you have a shy at it, eh?"

"No fear," broke in a chorus of voices.

Meanwhile, wet to the skin, his horse going more and more dickey at every step, Donald was being piloted by his friend to the nearest station. They were miles away from home, but to reach the line of railway was a present difficulty. "I think, you know, if I'd kept him going instead of waiting to see the fox broken up, he wouldn't have been so bad," remarked Brewster. "I am afraid we can't rise much of a pace; to my mind he's lame all round."

"Jog him if you can; it's all we can do to catch this train, and there's not another for four hours."

"Bless me," answered Donald, "we must do it. I ache in every limb, and it strikes me, the Rake will by that time have laid him down to die!"

Getting a trot out of him, which was but a stumbling performance, Donald did his best to follow his friend. The welcome signals soon met their view; the train was due, a last plodding effort and they were in the station.

"Very sorry, indeed, sir; she's late as it is; I can't delay for the horse-box."

"But, man alive, there's one on the siding, and my friend can't leave his horse; he's wet through and through himself, and get the horse back to the stable we must."

"Well, Mr. Lorrimer, they must have the horses in sharp. It's really Captain Vane's box!"

"He rode home half-an-hour ago." So it was settled, and the train took the two sportsmen back. When they arrived at their journey's end, the Rake, whose heels had been making havoc against the sides of his box, set to work to kicking so vigorously on the platform that it was a matter of peril to approach him. Donald got hold of his head and looked him full in the face. "Blood will tell, there's no doubt about it," was all the remark he made. And so we will leave them, this Antipodean stranger, out for the first time with the Gadthorpe, and this breedy screw which would not be denied. We may never meet again, but it is well to have to bear record to what may be done when a man takes to hunting again, after "declining" it, perforce, for the lapse of Two Decades!

MY SANCTUARY.

THERE is a chamber in my heart
Sacred, from all the world apart.
Trembling and sad within its door
I enter, all my griefs to pour.
Again : when Pleasure's wreath has bound
My soul and senses gaily round,
I seek its silence, there to store
Treasures of joys that are no more.
And lo ! Love's mirage oft appears,
To rise in splendour—set in tears.
Then in that chamber, steep'd in gloom,
My hopes of love I deep entomb.

Around those chamber walls are spread
The spirit-pictures of the dead ;
My mother's face shines softly there,
Fram'd in its wealth of auburn hair.
Her earnest eyes, with tender smile,
Lifting my drooping soul awhile
Out of the toil, above the strain,
For all this earthly loss and gain.
And in the shadow of her face
Dimly another's eyes I trace ;
A father's features come and go,
In memory's fitful ebb and flow.

My Sanctuary.

There happy hours of childhood dear,
Steal back on spirit-wings to cheer,
The long sad days—the nights of thought,
Amid the pictures memory wrought.
But oh ! one face I ever see—
Asleep—awake—it follows me.
A noble beauty calmly lies
On lips and brow and loving eyes.
Tho' that brave heart's fond beat is still,
That oft with rapture's pulse would thrill,
Dear eyes, within thy depths still shine
A husband's love ! For ever mine.

ANNA COMTESSE DE BRÉMONT.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

AND as Mr. Robert Jarrett continued to stare, he suddenly woke to the consciousness that the young lady, whoever she might be, possessed a very charming face. A face soft, and fresh, and fair; round in form, delicate in colouring, and beautified by a pair of clear gray eyes, fringed with long dark eye-lashes, whose straightforward and honest expression was attractive in the extreme.

She reddened imperceptibly at his somewhat prolonged scrutiny. Then finding he did not reply to her offer of assistance, she broke into a little laugh, and said lightly:

"Ah! I see you think I am making a vain boast, in offering to help you out of your present dilemma, but the difficulty is by no means as great as it seems."

"It has puzzled me for some time," said Bob, wiping his damp brow with a silk pocket handkerchief. "I never saw such a gate in my life."

She laughed again, merrily like a little child, and clapped her hands together.

"Ah! you are not the first gentleman who has been similarly baffled. Indeed, I often tell Farmer Budge quite seriously that he ought to put up a notice, giving full directions as to how his gates open, but he declares this is precisely what he does not want. Now, look here and I will show you the secret. There! do you see?" and stooping down from the saddle, she pressed a small iron knob, imbedded in the wood at the very end of the latch, and which Bob in his impatience had entirely overlooked.

The gate immediately flew open.

"It is quite simple once you know the way," she said with a smile of amusement.

"Like a good many other things," he remarked, as he led The Swell on to the road.

"These latches were exhibited at the last Agricultural Show,

I believe," she went on, talking naturally and easily. "Farmer Budge has taken out a patent and claims to be the inventor. He is very proud of them, but all the hunting gentlemen are loud in their condemnation."

"I don't wonder. They are diabolical things, and I really can't think what would have become of me if you had not just happened to appear when you did."

"And yet you looked a little disappointed, at least judging from the expression of your face," she said archly.

Bob blushed. He had no idea that his countenance had betrayed him, or that she would prove so discerning.

"How sharp you are. Well, I will not deny the truth. I *was* a little disappointed, because I thought it had come to be a regular case of brute force, which would require a couple of men's strength."

"Whereas female cunning has answered the purpose as well," she retorted gaily.

"It has answered the purpose so far, that I cannot help feeling I owe you an immense debt of gratitude."

And as he spoke, he caught hold of The Swell's mane, hoisted himself into the saddle, and moved on a pace or two.

His companion, whose way was apparently identical, instead of wishing him good-bye, continued to ride by his side. She was not very smartly dressed, not nearly as smartly as Lady De Fochsey. Her plain black habit showed symptoms of wear. It had a large leather patch over the knee, and the seams were decidedly thread-bare; but for all that, Bob thought there was no comparison between the two women. With the one, every tone, every action, was evidently studied; with the other, a freedom from all self-consciousness gave her an undefinable charm, which he felt before he had been two minutes in her presence.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "how dreadfully lame your poor horse is. What is the matter with him?"

"I don't know," answered Bob. "But I can't get him along at all."

"You shouldn't try to," she said reproachfully, as he endeavoured to increase the speed. "If you do, you deserve to be taken up for cruelty to animals."

"It would not matter if it were not so infernally cold," he rejoined with a shiver.

She looked up at him with an air of true feminine pity, which sank deep into the foolish fellow's heart. All through the day that particular organ had been hardening and hardening, until at last it felt like a stone. One single glance from a pretty, fresh-faced young woman made a curious difference in his sensations. It was so sweet to find that *somebody* sympathized in his misfortunes, instead of turning them into ridicule. A lump came into his throat, as her soft, compassionate eyes rested upon him.

"Did you meet with an accident?" she asked commiseratingly.

It was as if he could not tell her an untruth, or even conceal his shortcomings.

"I tumbled off into a brook. My horse stopped short, and I flew over his head. No doubt I ought not to have quitted the pigskin, but I did."

He spoke with a kind of defiant doggedness, which betrayed a secret fear that she might laugh at him. Apparently nothing was further from her intentions. She had laughed merrily enough a few moments ago. He had only thought to himself how pure and childlike her mirth sounded. But now her little flower-like face, with its large eyes and rose-bud mouth, looked very grave and sedate.

"Everybody comes off when they ought not to," she said consolingly. "We think nothing of such small casualties down here. Why! the very best rider in all the Hunt—a poor man who was killed only the other day, flew off last season before the whole Field, without any apparent reason. But tell me, have you far to go? Because if so, we could change saddles, and I might lend you my dear old Mouse to ride home upon. You would get there sooner."

Bob was quite affected by the kindness of this proposal, coming as it did from a complete stranger.

"And you—what would you do?" he said after a slight pause.

"I? Oh! I should put your horse into our stable, and let the poor thing remain there till you send for him. How much further have you got to go?" returning to her point.

"I really haven't an idea. I'm a stranger, and have never hunted here before to-day."

"Will you tell me, then, for what place you are bound? I know most of the distances pretty accurately, having lived in this part of the world nearly all my life."

"I am bound for Straightem Court," said Bob in reply.

She gave a little start.

"Then you are Mr. Jarrett! I thought as much."

"Did you? How was that?" he asked with awakening curiosity.

"Because I know the greater number of the regular *habitués* of our hunt, at all events by sight."

"Don't you think," said Bob, "that since I have told you my name, you might as well tell me yours; it's always more comfortable to know who people are."

"If it would add to your *comfort* in any way, Mr. Jarrett," she replied jestingly, "I have great pleasure in informing you that my name is Dot." And two mischievous dimples appeared in either cheek.

"Dot!" he repeated, lingering unconsciously on the word. "What is Dot short for?"

"Dorothea. Being a rather small person, I was presented with a very grand name. But as everybody seems to find it rather a mouthful, it has been reduced to Dot."

"Dot what? I rather like Dot," and Bob stole a glance at her; "but I suppose you have a surname like all the rest of the world."

"Oh! yes, Lankester. But let me introduce myself formally. Miss Dorothea Lankester, only daughter of Doctor Hugh Lankester, who enjoys the privilege and distinction of dispensing nostrums to the good people in your village. When you require medical aid, Mr. Jarrett, please think of us." And she turned a pair of laughing gray eyes full upon him.

"Would you come to nurse me?" he asked, chiming in with her mood.

"I should have to. No choice would be given me in the matter. So mind and don't fall ill. I always say I would rather attend to a dozen women than one man."

"Why? I should have thought it would have been the other way about."

"Because the men have not got a bit of pluck, and give in at once. They always make up their minds that they are going to die, even if they only cut their finger, whereas women are so used to discomfort and physical pain, that they bear even the most dreadful sufferings with stoicism."

"I shouldn't mind putting up with a good deal of discomfort to be nursed by you," said Bob, still harping on the same idea, and getting bolder as he began to feel more at ease.

"Oh! no, you wouldn't." And she pursed up her little face till it wore a comically severe expression. "I'm an awfully strict nurse and keep my patients in thorough order."

"I hope we shall see a great deal of each other," he said, visions of neighbourly visits, pleasant dinners, and delightful country rides with Miss Dot flashing across his mind's eye. "It will be so nice for us to be good friends."

"Very," she replied with frank unconsciousness. "The worst of it is, father is generally so dreadfully busy, he hardly ever has a moment to himself. He was only saying to-day, that really we ought to call upon you."

"Who are we?" asked Bob, artfully endeavouring to find out of how many members Miss Lankester's family consisted.

"Mother and me. Father very seldom is able to come with us when we leave his paste-boards."

"Don't pay me a formal visit," he said eagerly. "I do so hate them. And—and—what day may I expect you?" He was making great strides towards intimacy. Somehow he felt as if he had known her all his life.

"I really can't say exactly, Mr. Jarrett," she replied, smiling at his *empressement*.

"Come any non-hunting day. Tuesday, for instance. That's to-morrow, isn't it?"

"Very well, I'll ask mother."

"Wait a bit, though. Why not come to dinner?" urged hospi-

table Bob. "It would be ever so much jollier." Then, with a sudden burst of confidence, inspired by Miss Dot's sympathetic manner, he added plaintively: "I can't tell you how lonely I've been all this time. It will be a perfect godsend to me to have somebody to talk to."

"Don't you find everybody remarkably talkative out hunting?" asked Dot mischievously.

"No, very much the reverse. They seem a rum lot of fellows, at least, according to my way of thinking. I never met a duller, solemn set in my life."

Dot's clear laugh rang out. It did him good to hear it. There was something so genuine and so hearty about her laughter.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I perceive that either directly or indirectly you have been making the acquaintance of some of our great people."

"Yes," he said savagely. "They are *very* great, at all events in their own estimation. As for me, I confess I cannot see wherein lies their superiority over the rest of mankind. They are intolerably rude and entirely wanting in good manners."

Then he checked himself suddenly, feeling that he might possibly be committing an indiscretion, and that it was scarcely wise to abuse folk with whom Miss Lankester was probably well acquainted. For all he knew, they were perhaps personal friends of hers.

"Forgive me," he said, turning crimson. "I was forgetting that I might be hurting your feelings."

She smiled brightly, and when she smiled, Bob could not account for the attraction her face possessed. With the exception of the eyes, it owned no really striking feature, and yet he admired and liked her more than any girl he had ever seen. His own sisters were good-looking, but there was a subtle refinement about Miss Lankester which he felt was wanting in their case. Nevertheless, it was hard to define the difference. As for Lady De Fochsey, she seemed positively vulgar in comparison.

"Pray don't have any fear of hurting my feelings," said Dot, with just a touch of satire audible in her clear young voice. "We are only small fry; and such exalted personages as the Mutual Adorationites do not even condescend to know us. We regard their many virtues from a distance——"

"The greater the better," he interrupted.

"But," she went on more seriously, "you must not condemn all Englishmen from the specimens you may have seen to-day. There are some"—and a tender look illumined all her face—"who don't live exclusively for their personal pleasure and consider it the chief and foremost object of existence. Men whose ideal is not mere amusement, but something worthier and nobler, and who see that work and work alone can bring out the grit and substance of a man's character."

Bob looked at his companion with growing interest. She spoke enthusiastically, and her views evidently coincided with his own. Young as he was, he had arrived at a philosophy of life which in substance was much the same.

"You are right, no doubt," he said. "And those are the men I thought and hoped I should meet over here. Perhaps I expected too much." And he gave a sigh of disappointment.

"I don't think so. You forget that those who represent the hunting-field mostly belong to the rich and consequently idle class: a class without professions, and which has no incentive to bring its higher faculties into play."

"They look down upon a fellow," said Bob bitterly, "because his clothes are different from their own, because he has not been born in England, and for a hundred and one different reasons, equally trifling. I am sharp enough to know what they think of me. They think me an 'outsider,' and therefore cut me dead. It's not pleasant being cut, Miss Lankester," he concluded pathetically. "One can't help feeling it, especially when, as in my case, you have always been brought up to look upon these men as brothers, and people of your own kith and kin."

"Never mind," said Dot soothingly. "Things may very likely improve after a bit, and in any case, you must not form your opinions too hastily. I only wish you knew a man——"

But she stopped short, and did not finish the sentence. A bright blush rose to her face, and Bob wondered inwardly what had caused it, whether some chance word of his had touched any secret chord.

"Good-bye, Mr. Jarrett," she said, after a somewhat prolonged pause, holding out her hand as she spoke. "Here we are in the village. You cannot possibly mistake your way now, since if you go straight on for another hundred yards you will see the gates of Straightem Court. I turn down here," pointing to a side road that branched off at right angles from the main one.

"Good-bye," said Bob, reluctantly, detaining her little gloved hand decidedly longer than strict politeness demanded. "I'm tremendously obliged to you."

"What for?" she asked, with the innocence of a child.

"Oh! for ever so much. I felt most awfully down in the mouth when you joined me at that beastly gate, regularly out of sorts all round, but thanks to your company I am pounds better already."

"I am very glad to hear it, Mr. Jarrett. Please keep up your spirits, and don't forget that we English, as a race, are not so bad as you seem to imagine."

"I except the fair sex," he replied gallantly. "I think that English women—especially English girls—are perfectly delightful."

"Oh! so you have made their acquaintance already, have you?"

"Yes," he answered, raising his hat with the courtesy of an

Elizabethan knight. "I have met *you*, Miss Lankester. That is quite enough for me."

Her smooth, pink cheek turned just a shade pinker, but otherwise she took but little heed of the implied compliment. It did not ruffle her calm serenity.

Dot Lankester was not a flirt. Never did there a girl exist less coquettishly inclined. The frank simplicity of her nature prevented her from seeing in every man a possible lover; besides, she was content to remain as she was. In her youth and innocence she believed firmly in platonic friendships. She was touched, too, by Bob's confession of loneliness. She knew the big house, with its cold, formal rooms, and retinue of servants—knew it and shuddered at it. Some are born for grandeur, some are not. Dot's idea of happiness was a small abode, little bigger than a cottage, and two softly-treading maids to wait upon her. She did not covet wealth or the pomp of this world.

And so, she could fancy how dull and how home-sick the young man must feel, separated from all his relations, living alone in that great gray old place.

It was not in her power to do much for him, but what little she could, she would.

"Before you go, do promise faithfully to come on Tuesday," pleaded Bob, still holding her hand in his. "Surely you need not treat me like a stranger or stand on ceremony."

She withdrew it gently, and with a little air of quiet dignity, which told him as well as actual words that he must not attempt to take any liberties. If they were to be friends; the limits of their friendship must not be overstrained, especially on so short an acquaintance.

"Thank you. I will tell my father and mother of your kind invitation, and an answer shall be sent this evening. Will that do?" shortening Mouse's reins.

"It will have to do," he said, not feeling wholly satisfied, yet afraid to urge the matter further.

"Good-bye, then," she said again, this time moving away at a fairly brisk trot.

"Good-bye." And cold and wet as Bob was, he reined in The Swell until Miss Lankester's girlish form had completely disappeared from vision.

Coming to him as she had done, in the midst of his distress—the only person during all that day who had treated him kindly and with commiseration—he felt ready to fall down and worship at her feet. His imagination magnified a hundredfold the service she had performed.

So deeply does a very little sympathy sink into the heart of those whose sensibilities have been outraged and feelings wounded.

At such times a few kind words will restore a man's self-respect and make him the friend for life of the woman who utters them.

Only such words are dangerous, from the very fact that he is apt to think too much of them and to take them for more than they are worth.

In Bob's case, he immediately jumped at the conclusion, that as a specimen of a fair, frank English girl, utterly devoid of conceit or affectation, there were not many who could compare with Miss Dorothea Lankester.

He had arrived at the age of four-and-twenty, and, strange to say, had never been seriously in love. The Australian maidens had failed to captivate his fancy, though perhaps the reason might have partly been that until now he was not in a position to marry. Be this as it may, those five minutes spent in Miss Dot's society, her gray eyes, and fresh young face, put some very strange and novel ideas into his head.

He himself was startled by their presence and by the suddenness with which they took form and shape. Only yesterday he would have been the very readiest to laugh at such a thing as love at first sight. To-day he was by no means so sure that it was as idiotic and absurd as he had hitherto maintained.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

HAD our friend Bob not had the good fortune to encounter Dot Lankester when he did, he would most assuredly have been sunk in the lowest depths of despair on proceeding to review the results of the day, to which he had looked forward with such a large amount of youthful enthusiasm. Few pleasures equal the anticipation that they excite. When they do they are too short-lived to produce any substantial satisfaction. Only a few brief moments, snatched from the dreary waste of life, which we fain would lengthen if we could, but whose very brightness makes the dull, daily path seem darker in comparison. Every human being has an insatiate—perhaps a selfish—desire for happiness. It is all very well to philosophize, to preach wisdom, moderation and content. When we are first put into the world, and are young and sanguine, we all of us expect something from it. We look upon it as a kind of fairy godmother, who will certainly grant our wishes and fulfil our desires. It takes a good many years to learn the truth, and the learning is seldom pleasant. Some never learn it. The lesson is too hard. They cannot understand why, instead of showering good gifts upon her children, the world only robs them of their small possessions, and takes away with hard covetous hand, faith, hope and illusion. What then is left? Little save endurance. A growing apathy which renders the buffets of Fate a trifle less hard to bear, and a conviction of the pettiness of human strivings,

when opposed to the stern, resistless pressure of nature. A sense of defeat still hung over Bob. He was as sore morally as if he had been thoroughly thrashed for an uncommitted offence. Nevertheless the remembrance of Dot's innocent face, when she had looked up into his own and offered to lend him her cob, exercised a wonderfully soothing effect upon his over-wrought nervous system.

It contrived to render bearable what otherwise would have seemed wholly unbearable. For his heart was full of wrath when he reflected upon the reception accorded him by the master of the Morbey Anstead hounds and his friend General Prosieboy. It was useless trying to persuade himself that he did not care. He *did* care, and moreover very deeply; although he declared inwardly that he was every bit as good as these men who affected to despise him. But it was not enough for him to know the fact, he wanted them to acknowledge it also. Besides, was he not their neighbour, and the owner of lands broad and goodly? Surely these latter entitled him to some consideration.

In short, Bob was very angry, almost as angry as he had been when he had caught one of his cowboys red-handed in the act of torturing some cattle. From that day until this no such volcano had raged within his breast. He hardly realized what tumultuous passions he possessed. But if he was quick-tempered, he was not vindictive.

By the time he had eaten a good dinner, comforted the inner man by flesh, and fowl, and wine, his anger gradually cooled. He was thoroughly warm again now, having as soon as the evening meal came to an end taken up his quarters in the smallest and cosiest sitting-room in the house, and ensconced himself in a luxurious arm-chair before a blazing fire, whose blue and yellow flames shot merrily up the chimney, licking its sooty sides with greedy avidity.

A long day's hunting in the open air, especially when accompanied by an increase of the physical temperature, gives birth to a gentle lassitude, which promotes dreams, and renders a state of do-nothing not only permissible but enjoyable.

A man feels at such seasons that he has earned a right to repose, and nine times out of ten gives himself up to slumber, or, if not slumber, to quiet meditation which encroaches on the borderland of sleep. Bob began by going over all his experiences since the morning. He summed up the pleasures and the pains with almost morbid precision, trying hard not to detract from the former, or to exaggerate the latter. But do what he would the pains preponderated until, down the road of thought, his brain travelled as far as Miss Dot.

There he came to a complete halt, almost as if he did not care to pursue his retrospections further, but was quite content to dwell upon the image conjured up by her frank face, bright eyes and soft fresh tints.

And all of a sudden it occurred to him, like a genuine flash of inspiration, that the big, desolate house, with its empty rooms, and uninhabited appearance, might wear a very different and more home-like aspect if presided over by a clear-headed, sweet-voiced mistress. What was wanting at Straightem Court was a gracious, feminine influence. He had felt it from the first moment he set foot inside the hall, but now there could be no doubt whatever about the matter. A man alone could not possibly keep authority in the household, or make the intricate wheels of domestic life run smoothly. How was *he* to order dinner, and add up the butcher's book, and keep peace between the maid-servants? There was only one answer to such a question, and that answer was—impossible. He could look after cattle and sheep, attend to the farm and stables, but as to ordering in legs of mutton and sirloins of beef—why he simply could not do it. He revolted at the mere thought of entering into such petty details. As for women, it was the business of their lives. Man-like it never struck him that the same "petty details" which worried him while he scorned them have rendered many a woman miserable, and laid a daily burden on her shoulders under the weight of which she often groans.

But there is no escape for her. One of the chief uses of a wife is to lay the blame of everything that happens at her door. And for this reason, of all luxuries she is the greatest. It is so easy and so nice to be able to say in a loud, chiding voice, "My dear, it is your fault. I told you to do it," or, "Why the dickens! have you made such a regular mull of things all round?"

The responsibility is shifted, very conveniently, and the poor "luxury" can only mumble feeble excuses and in her turn try to implicate Mary Anne or Susan Jane.

Bob had had about ten days' house-keeping, and already he wished to resign the situation. He told himself that with a nice little wife sitting opposite, even English dinners might prove enjoyable. His imagination could not conceive of Mrs. Robert. P. Jarrett's fascinations being put to a greater test, but he believed Dot would emerge from the ordeal triumphant. True, he was very young to think of marrying; indeed, up till now, he had always been a staunch advocate of the theory that men should have their fling—and a good one too—before settling down to jog-trot matrimony.

But it is astonishing how a pretty face and good eyes will revolutionize the most strong-minded male's theories, crumbling them to the very dust with lightning-like rapidity. They can alter a man's whole train of reasoning in a few seconds, and, more wonderful still, make him advance an entirely new line of argument. No deserter in action could possibly change front with greater speed or make more plausible excuses for his conduct.

Bob, who hitherto had professed to be a confirmed bachelor, felt suddenly convinced that the proper thing to do, was to marry a

girl directly you saw one who you thought would suit you. Only fools shilly-shallied under such circumstances.

The funny thing was how, after five short minutes' conversation with Dot, he should have arrived at so momentous a conclusion as to believe that he had certainly discovered his affinity, and could not possibly be enchained by any other.

How men can flatter themselves they know anything of a woman's real character in such a brief space of time is marvellous, to say the least of it. And yet that they do so imagine is seen every-day of one's life, and proved by the ill-assorted and incongruous couples so frequently met with. A face endowed by nature with certain good points, a pink and white complexion and a nice expression, is quite sufficient to convince the lords of creation that they know the proprietor perfectly well. Just think of it! *I know* WOMAN! that masterpiece of caprice, of fitful moods and sudden impulses; that coy, uncertain, changeable creature who does not even pretend to know herself, and who admits the variability of her character.

Oh! men, beware of your passions. They render you blind as the veriest mole that ever burrowed earth. For fully an hour Bob sat there musing rapturously on Miss Dot's perfections. Then by degrees a sleepy inclination stole over him. At last he made a vigorous effort, and rising from the arm-chair, laid aside his pipe and went towards the writing table. It was some time since he had written to his mother, and she would be getting anxious if she did not hear from him. Therefore he sat down and inscribed the following letter:

“DEAREST MOTHER,

“I sent you a hurried account of my uncle's sudden death and the altered circumstances in which it left me. Even now I can scarcely realize all that has happened, or appreciate what I suppose most people would call my good fortune. I need not say that I wish you and my brothers and sisters to share in it. It is unnecessary attempting to describe Straightem Court to you, because of course you know it well. I will only mention that in size and grandeur it far exceeds my expectations. Indeed, I often think I should like the place better if it were not quite so big. Ten days have elapsed since my arrival, and I begin to doubt if I shall ever settle down. Everything seems so new and so strange—forgive me if I add so dull and so formal. There is a want of freedom here, a stiffness and a conventionality which produce a stifling effect upon me. People all seem to jog on in one little narrow groove, from which they either cannot or will not emancipate themselves. The consequence is there is very little real independence such as we see at home; the ladies and gentlemen are very much to be pitied in my opinion; as far as I have had an opportunity of judging, they are mere slaves to their establishments,

their institutions and their bodily comforts. They are like a flock of sheep; if one treads a particular path they all follow, however inconvenient and ridiculous it may be. Appearances are evidently a great deal studied in this country; the verdict of the world carries much weight, yet in curious contradiction to this fact, the upper classes seem going to the dogs altogether. From what I gather, their morality is at a very low ebb. Even dukes and duchesses figure in the Divorce Court. There is a famous case going on now, some of the details of which would simply horrify you. The men here have no veneration for women; it is dreadful the way they speak of them, and yet I am informed that in fashionable society the women deserve all they get. But whether they do, or whether they don't, it seems to me a mean, unmanly sort of thing to go about backbiting the poor creatures. You will think I have turned very censorious, so now for a change of subject. I went out hunting to-day for the first time; the sport is a grand one; I don't believe there is another that can compare with it, and yet it seems odd too, wherein the pleasure consists of chasing a little red animal, and running the risk of breaking your bones, if not your neck, in the pursuit. But there are some things that don't bear analyzing and, thank goodness! fox-hunting is one of them. May it never be picked to pieces by a herd of dissecting critics, for when it ceases to exist England's day will be done, and she can take a back seat among the nations; so much for the glorious chase. You see what an enthusiast it has made of me. But the field! the people! those genial, jovial squires whose acquaintance I so longed to make; words cannot describe the insolence of their manners towards an unoffending stranger. To tell you how they treated your first-born, mother dear, would only pain you. Therefore I pass over my reception in silence. Suffice it that all my illusions are gone, I fear me, never to return. The question is, whether I shall be able to live amongst these people. And this brings me to an important point. How strange it seems having to communicate one's plans by letter. At present it is horribly cold over here, and later on the climate becomes, if possible, worse. Now what I would propose is this. In the spring I must certainly return to Australia, if only to wind up affairs and hand over the farm to Dick. Instead, therefore, of you and the girls joining me at once, leaving warmth and sunshine and coming to frost and fogs, I am of opinion that it would be far wiser to defer your journey, until the winter is over. Then we might all travel back together. What do you say to this idea? To tell the honest truth, I feel as if my life here were an experiment. I may or I may not settle to it. In two or three months' time I should be in a better position to judge whether you and the girls are likely to be as happy at Straightem Court as at home. We have been colonists so long that frequently I have misgivings as to our ever succeeding in converting ourselves into fine gentlemen and ladies of the orthodox

type. One needs to be brought up to it. To break up our dear old home before we are perfectly certain the new one will suit us, appears to me an imprudent act. For myself, it is quite on the cards that you may see me, at any time, return unexpectedly. I feel awfully homesick already, and miss you all most dreadfully. I never thought it would be possible to get so dead tired of one's own society. Nobody has condescended to call upon me so far, except a couple of parsons, who both immediately begged for subscriptions to various charities. The County people seem a very stuck-up lot. I don't wonder you preferred my father, and showed your good sense by running away from them. And now, dear mother, I am very tired and very sleepy, and must leave off. Give my love to Belle and Tottie, and the little ones, and tell Dick from me that I trust to him to look after you well in my absence.

"Ever your affectionate son,
"ROBERT P. JARRETT."

Not a word of Miss Lankester. Something made Bob shy of mentioning her name, even to those he confided in most.

And yet he felt as guilty as if he were concealing a secret of vital importance. He re-read his letter, and made some trifling corrections. But when he came to the end a sudden impulse urged him to add:

"I forgot to tell you that I am giving my first dinner-party to-morrow night. It is almost absurd to call it by such a name, since the company consist only of a Doctor and Mrs. Lankester and their daughter. They live in the village, and are my nearest neighbours."

Bob perused this postscript with considerable self-approbation. It satisfied his conscience and yet revealed nothing. He felt proud of having handled such a delicate matter with so much skill, for if, at any future time, there should be anything to tell, then he flattered himself that he had paved the way for telling it. At least the name of Lankester would not burst like a bombshell upon the family circle.

As he sealed up his letter Charles brought in a note on a silver salver.

It was from Dot.

The contents were brief enough.

"DEAR MR. JARRETT,

"My father and mother wish me to thank you for your kind invitation, and to say that we shall be very pleased to dine with you to-morrow at half-past seven.

"Hoping you feel none the worse for having got so wet, believe me,

"Yours sincerely,
"DOROTHEA LANKESTER."

Only a formal note of acceptance, worded in polite but distant language, and yet Bob gazed at it with rapturous admiration.

What a pretty handwriting she wrote! so clean, and neat, and thoroughly feminine. He liked the way she crossed her t's and dotted her i's; there was a deal of character about them. And then he took to speculating how the signature would look if it were signed Dorothea Jarrett instead of Dorothea Lankester.

Lankester was a fine, high-sounding name. The sort of name just suited for the heroine of a novel, but for all that there was something very pleasing about Jarrett.

D. for Dorothea, and J. for Jarrett went well together—very well, he considered.

So, with his head stuffed full of strange new thoughts, this hitherto sensible young man went to bed, and—dreamt of Miss Dot?

Not he.

He was far too tired and stiff to indulge in any trance-like visions.

The dun cob, the gray eyes, the frank, innocent face, all faded from his mind as if they had been a mirage, and settling down between the sheets he slept like a top.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GETTING UP A FLIRTATION.

PUNCTUALLY at half-past seven next morning Bob was roused from his dreamless slumbers by Charles, who, after tapping at the door and receiving no response, entered the room majestically, and began pulling up the blinds with noisy clumsiness.

"Hulloa! Charles, is that you? What's the time?" yawned Bob.

"It has just gone half-past seven, sir."

"By Jove! You don't say so."

And before he was thoroughly awake Bob jumped out of bed, goaded by the knowledge that he had a journey to take. After his experiences of the previous day the indifference to personal appearance which he had hitherto displayed vanished miraculously. He was prepared to admit that there might be something in clothes after all. Those soft snowy leathers and bright scarlet coats undoubtedly did set a man off. Until he had actually seen them with his own eyes he could not have realized how great an effect they produced. In fact, all Bob's ideas on the subject of adornment had undergone a complete transformation. He was now filled with a consuming desire to appear out hunting dressed precisely as his neighbours were dressed.

Consequently he had decided to run up to town, and lose no time

in ordering a suitable stock of boots and breeches. Although he had said as little as possible about the discomforts caused by his attire, and the breaking of those elastic straps, he had been unable to prevent Charles from acquiring a tolerably accurate knowledge of the situation; and Charles had strongly advised and approved of his going to London and purchasing a proper hunting kit without any delay.

"I told you afore you went 'unting 'ow it would be, sir," he said with a malicious chuckle. Consequently Bob had studied the Bradshaw, and discovered that if he rose tolerably early he could reach the metropolis a little after eleven o'clock and return in time for dinner.

So he dressed hurriedly, ate an excellent breakfast, and by half-past eight was bowling along to the station in a light, two-wheeled cart, drawn by a hog-maned, fast-trotting pony.

The morning was fresh and bright.

The big, green fields on either side of the hedgerows were steeped in pale, yellow sunshine, not fierce and glaring as in the summer-time, but cool, light, clear, and refreshing to the eye. Every now and again a swift, dark cloud-shadow would come coursing along their emerald surface, for a few minutes converting all the vivid tints into a sombre grey. But as it raced ahead it was beautiful to behold the glory of leaf and blade bursting out afresh, appearing yet brighter and greener for their temporary obliteration.

Big, black, limpid-eyed oxen stood close under the hedges, rubbing their broad, scurfy foreheads against the knotted twigs, and slowly but steadily boring apertures in the thick fences with their strong, polished horns.

Gay autumnal hues adorned the trees; red, brown and yellow combined to render their last span of life beautiful. Their tall, irregular tops towered up towards the faint blue sky, and in places where the leaves had already fallen, revealed the delicate network of their construction. As for the birds, they were twittering and chirping, flitting and alighting, almost as if the time of year had been March instead of November, forgetting that the winter was approaching with its cruel frosts, cold snows, and pitiless winds. They recked not of the future, wee, happy, thoughtless things! The present with its gladsome sunshine was all they cared about, believing that this one bright day would last for ever.

As Bob drove along, the cool, bracing air bringing a healthy glow to his cheeks, he thought that never had he been out on so fair a morning. What struck him most was the astonishing greenness of everything. Here was no sign of drought or barrenness, but everywhere the same verdant, fertile stretches of undulating pastures meeting the sky line and extending in all directions, far as eye could reach. It was a perfect harmony of blue and green, with a dash of yellow thrown in to give light to the whole.

Bob arrived at the station in good time, took his ticket, purchased a morning paper, and ensconced himself in a smoking-carriage.

He waited thus some minutes, when beginning to wonder why the train did not start he put his head out of the window. Then for the first time he became aware of a commotion on the platform, which appeared to be caused by a dapper little female figure, enveloped in a thick Scotch ulster, that presently came tripping along as fast as it could move for a pair of brand new, and evidently extremely tight, hunting boots.

"I'm late, dreadfully late," cried an excited feminine voice, speaking in high, agitated tones. "There was a mistake about the horse-box. Put me in anywhere; I'm not at all particular."

Bob had already filled and lit a favourite cherry-wood pipe. The next moment, to his no small discomfiture, he found the owner of the voice securely locked into his compartment by a stalwart, red-bearded guard.

"What an idiot that boy of mine is, to be sure!" exclaimed the fair one crossly, apparently too much flustered to notice that she was not alone, and evidently venting her wrath by giving utterance to it aloud. "I declare if he didn't go and take a ticket for Masterton, when I told him as distinctly as possible overnight that I intended hunting with the Gallopers to-day, instead of with the Seldom Kill hounds. I really think I shall have to give him warning. His stupidity is too great for anything."

So saying, she stood up and smoothed her ruffled plumes, buttoned up her ulster, and generally adjusted her toilette, the finishing touches of which had clearly been performed in a hurry. The train whistled, and moved slowly out of the station. She was jerked back into her seat, and Bob half rose to go to her assistance.

The recognition was instantaneous.

"Lady De Fochsey!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Jarrett!" she ejaculated on her side, in well-pleased accents, for Bob's fresh, good-looking face had already made an impression upon her ladyship out hunting, and she was determined to get up a flirtation, in the hopes that that long deferred passion might possibly spring into life. "I do hope you will forgive my forcing my company upon you in this exceedingly unceremonious fashion, but the truth is, I was so abominably late that I really had not time to notice whether the guard put me into a smoking-carriage or not."

(As a matter of fact, she invariably chose one by preference, having a rooted dislike to the society of her own sex, but this idiosyncrasy she did not deem fit to mention.)

"Pray don't apologize," said Bob politely, knocking the tobacco out of his pipe with an alacrity more feigned than real.

"Oh! Mr. Jarrett, why did you do that?"

"I thought you might object to smoke. Nine ladies out of ten do."

"I don't. Not in the least. I assure you I'm quite accustomed to it. Besides"—casting a languishing glance at him from under her goldenish eyelashes—"you need not mind me, surely."

"I can't help minding you," he responded audaciously, having already decided that if he indulged in a few flowers of speech, there was not much fear of his meeting with a rebuff. "You are far too charming to be ignored, wherever you may be."

She smiled encouragingly. This young man promised uncommonly well; better even than she had suspected. She had feared he might prove shy, but now she altered her opinion. If there was one thing she loved in this world, it was a good, honest, out-spoken admission of her charms. If only her admirers would keep on telling her that she was pretty, fascinating, divine, she could forgive them almost any impertinence. She was not very strait-laced, but flattery she must have.

"When are you coming to see me?" she inquired coquettishly, in answer to Bob's remark.

"When are you going to ask me?" he rejoined, giving up any attempt at reading the newspaper, and seating himself directly opposite to her.

"I have asked you already, Mr. Jarrett."

"Only in a very general way. I don't want to come and find you out. I should prefer your specifying a day, if you have no objection."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "how punctilious we are, to be sure! Do you always stand on so much ceremony? One is not accustomed to it now-a-days."

"Yes," answered Bob gravely, "whenever there is a pretty woman in the case, I would rather have five minutes' chat with her alone than three hours in the presence of a dozen other men. The fact of the matter is, I'm covetous, and prefer not sharing my bone."

Lady De Fochsey was delighted. She thoroughly enjoyed this style of conversation, and moreover possessed the happy faculty of believing that where she herself was concerned men meant all they said, and were perfectly sincere in their professions of admiration.

"Oh, you flatterer!" she said, shaking her blonde head playfully at him, "you are trying to put me off with compliments, instead of settling a day for your visit. I call that too bad."

"Such an idea never entered my head," protested Bob. "When is your ladyship at home?"

"I'm always at home to my particular friends."

"And may I venture to think myself included in their number?"

"Now, Mr. Jarrett, you want to know too much. That's hardly a fair question."

"Perhaps not," he admitted. "I'll ask you another one instead. Tell me, is not Sunday generally supposed to be a good day for calling, or do your devotions prevent you from receiving gentlemen on that afternoon?"

"Oh! dear no, not at all."

"Ah! I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid you might have some religious scruples on the subject." He spoke with just a touch of sarcasm, which she detected and resented.

"I do not know why you should have imagined anything half so foolish," she rejoined tartly. "And as for my religious scruples, I flatter myself that I possess neither more nor less than my neighbours. Perhaps you mayn't believe me, but I always make a point of going to church every Sunday morning, if only for the sake of the example."

"One attendance franks you for the rest of the day, I presume?" said Bob, with a laugh.

She recovered her good humour. It was a relief to find he was not disagreeably strict.

"Well, yes, it does, I confess."

"Ah! I thought so."

"For my part," she said decidedly, "I can't see the least harm in entertaining a few amusing people on a Sabbath afternoon."

"Neither can I," he acquiesced, quite approving of the sentiment.

"In that case, Mr. Jarrett, I shall expect you on Sunday without fail."

"How long an audience do you grant your admirers at a time, Lady De Fochsey? Ten minutes, quarter of an hour?"

She laughed her little, thin, artificial laugh.

"You shall have a whole hour if you are good, and promise to come early."

"That I certainly will. The instant I've gobbled my lunch I shall set out."

"Do. I live quite close to Straightem Court, Mr. Jarrett. Only about two miles; it's nothing of a walk, and I hope you will come over often."

"Thanks, you are very kind. And I can assure you that were the walk ten times as long I should think nothing of the distance with such a reward awaiting me at the end of it."

She put out her foot, and glanced coyly down at it. It was a very pretty one, and she was quite aware of the fact, and saw no reason why other people should not become acquainted with it too. A clever woman always makes the most of her good points, and hides the bad ones. Lady De Fochsey was not a bit ashamed of her foot, no—nor of her ankle either. Thank goodness! they were both symmetrical and patrician, though her people were nobodies, and she herself was only in the position of a poorly paid companion, when Sir Jonathan had been smitten by her charms.

"Really, Mr. Jarrett," she said, in honied tones, "you will quite turn my head if you will insist on paying me so many compliments."

It was a regular invitation to repeat the offence. At all events, Bob, who was no fool, construed her ladyship's accusation as such, and construed it aright.

"I don't think it altogether fair to lay the whole blame at my door," he responded, feeling more and more amused by her transparent coquetries, and evident desire to egg him on.

"Why not?" she inquired with a simper.

"For the very simple reason that if that extremely pretty little head of yours were capable of being turned in such a manner, the mischief must have been done long since. I can only be one of many sinners."

"Positively, Mr. Jarrett, if you go on talking in this foolish fashion, I shall have to impose a fine upon you," she rejoined, her whole countenance beaming with delight.

"Any fine imposed upon me by your ladyship would be rapturously accepted," he said, not able to refrain from laughter.

Then thinking she might wonder at his mirth, and also that he had administered enough sugar—at any rate for the present—he added more seriously:

"By-the-by, where are you going to hunt to-day?"

"I? Oh! with the Gallopers. I get out at the next station——"

"So soon?" interrupted Bob, with a well-simulated sigh.

"Yes, you ridiculous creature. So soon, and what's more, I shan't have any too much time, as I have to ride nearly twelve miles to the meet."

"I had no idea you were so determined a Diana. But won't it make a very long day for you?" he inquired, wondering at her energy.

"It would, only, luckily for me, I am not coming home to-night. A great friend of mine, a Mrs. St. John, has asked me to stay at her house this evening. In fact, that was the principal reason why I determined to hunt to-day. I wanted to see the Gallopers, and I also wanted to attend a private *séance*, which is to take place to-night at Mrs. St. John's."

"A what?" echoed Bob, in tones of bewilderment.

"A *séance*. Surely you must know what that means."

"Not exactly. There are so many different kinds."

"Mrs. St. John is a firm believer in spiritualism," explained Lady De Fochsey, "and she has invited a well-known medium down from town, on purpose to try and obtain some fresh manifestations. Only a few chosen spirits are to be present."

"Do you go in for that kind of thing?" asked Bob, thinking what a queer mixture his companion was.

"A little," she answered, dropping her voice to a mysterious

whisper. "Mind you don't tell anybody. I don't wish it known all over the hunting-field, but I'm developing psychic force."

"Oh! indeed, and pray how do you develop it?"

"I can't tell you now. It would take too long, but I will some other time. Unfortunately I don't get on very fast."

"How's that? Uncongenial influences?"

"Yes, partly," she replied. "The difficult thing is that the electric current, which by many is supposed to be the foundation of all spiritualism, can only be communicated in my case by means of a kindred spirit."

"And do you mean to tell me that you have never come across one?" asked Bob incredulously.

She looked up at him with an odd, uncertain expression.

"No, Mr. Jarrett, I have not."

Then the blue eyes dropped suddenly, and she added hesitatingly: "But—perhaps—I may now. Who knows?" and up went those azure orbs again, with the most infantine and innocent of looks. Somehow they seemed to go right through Bob, and to produce a most uncomfortable sensation, just as if he were being requested to perform some action which went against the grain. He reddened up to the very roots of his hair, and remained transfixed, as it were, until her gaze was withdrawn. What a queer little mortal she was! He couldn't make her out at all.

Did she intend to convey the idea that *he* was the kindred spirit whose advent had been expected and looked forward to for so many years? His modesty took alarm at the thought.

And yet she was very pretty in her little, neat, got-up style, very pretty—and *very*, *VERY* amusing. Nevertheless so embarrassed did he feel by Lady De Fochsey's words and more than gracious manner, that it was quite a relief when the train in which they were travelling rushed into a station, and the lady declared that she had arrived at her destination.

"How quickly the time has gone, to be sure!" she exclaimed regretfully, gathering up her skirt, her hunting crop and her worsted gloves. "I had no idea we were so near Millingboro'! It only shows what an agreeable companion you have been. Good-bye, Mr. Jarrett; don't forget to come on Sunday."

And she waved the tips of her fingers airily, and hopped out on to the platform before Bob had had time to recover his self-possession.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" he asked, with a sudden sense of relief. "I will go and see after your horse-box if you like."

"My dear, foolish young man, don't think of such a thing. Why, your train starts again immediately. Ta! ta! And don't lose your heart in the gay but vicious metropolis."

So saying Lady De Fochsey walked away, and as the train once more moved off Bob could hear a high-pitched feminine

voice, shorn of all its dulcet and melodious intonations, scolding away at an unfortunate groom.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, as he settled himself in his seat, and once more re-lit the cherry-wood pipe. "That woman's a rum 'un, and no mistake. Awful sport, though, if she weren't quite such a humbug, and didn't stare at you in such a funny way. I wonder what the deuce she means by it." And then he thought of somebody who, he would stake his life, was as true and honest as the day; somebody who did not look at men in that queer, equivocal fashion, who scorned petty artifices and unjustifiable means of rendering herself attractive, and who, on that very account, was a hundred thousand times more so.

Fancy his talking to Miss Lankester in the free and easy style he had at once adopted when addressing Lady De Fochsey. He could imagine how wide the gray eyes would open with indignant amazement.

And now that he was alone, and removed from her ladyship's fascination, he even blamed himself for having been so familiar. The temptation certainly was great. It takes a very strong man to resist the advances of a good-looking woman. He may pick ever so many holes in her afterwards, but *at the time*, he can't help feeling flattered and amused, and if she gives him an inch, takes a liberal ell. Masculine nature will out.

Furthermore an irresistible sense of mischief had arisen within Bob's bosom. It was fun—splendid fun, paying the vain little woman high-flown compliments and seeing the avidity with which she swallowed them; but, nevertheless, when he came calmly to review his own conduct, he was fain to admit that such silly, butterfly specimens of the female sex could not exist unless men encouraged them.

It was the perpetual fostering of their vanity by speeches containing not a germ of truth, but which were accepted by the listener in perfect good faith, that was responsible for so painful and preposterous a pitch of feminine idiotcy.

In his heart of hearts, despite her youth, position, and personal attractions, Bob felt repulsed rather than drawn towards Lady De Fochsey. She represented a type of womanhood which he both pitied and despised. And yet he did not for one instant believe that there was any real harm in her. She was only silly—very silly and frivolous.

But he experienced an uncomfortable conviction, that he had encouraged her to be even more silly and more frivolous, just for his own amusement.

Was this right, or gentlemanly, or honourable?

He preferred not to answer the question.

For he had sense enough, and good feeling enough to know that female credulity, vanity, and folly, all combined, in the absence of much heart and a total deficiency of head-piece, render

a woman one of the saddest spectacles on the face of this earth.

As for what had been said between them, when one came to analyze the conversation, a single word summed it up.

That word was rubbish—unmitigated rubbish from beginning to end.

Yet, no doubt, this was the way people talked in polite society.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

ONE of the most fashionable gatherings of the month assembled in the Opera Comique on the occasion of the first night's representation of "Ariane," the new play by Mrs. Campbell-Praed, adapted from her novel, "The Bond of Wedlock." The evening was fraught with a special interest, apart from the fact that Mrs. Bernard-Beere's "first nights" have of late become social and literary events of such magnitude as to render the demand for seats quite phenomenal. The book had made its mark, as being a clever and audacious protest against the marriage laws. The characters in it are by no means idealized. In not one of them does the authoress aim at that perfection which often has the effect of irritating erring beings who have thoroughly realized that to be perfect in any relation of life involves a strain of daily, hourly effort, to which they do not feel themselves equal. Mrs. Campbell-Praed's heroine is chilly, exasperating, and irritatingly superior in her demeanour to her husband. Only when there is question of her child does she become all womanly and lovable. It is in her silence and her refined reticence that her fascination for the reader lies. This masterly quietude is lost in the play, where she is given smart speeches to make *à la* Lena Despard. But for Mrs. Bernard-Beere's skill in interpreting the part, Ariane would thus lose much of the spectators' sympathy, a sentiment more closely bound up with admiration than is commonly realized.

Those in the audience who had read the book were anxious to know whether the blow on which the story turns would be administered on the stage, and if so, how it would be managed. Mr. Henry Neville got over the difficulty in the cleverest way possible. No one could fail to admire the art with which he appeared to bruise his wife's arm and to fling her roughly on the couch, while in reality he hardly touched her. Another moot point was about the ending of the play. Eloquent as are the few last lines of the book in their calm demand for an estranged life, though "good friends before the world," the scene is in no sense dramatic. The husband is a man of the world, his wife a woman of culture and refinement. A few words quietly spoken and received with the courtesy of a bow, are enough to indicate the long years of estrangement that lay before them. But this would

not do for the stage. The question was: How would Mrs. Campbell-Praed finish her play with a situation sufficiently dramatic and striking? This she very certainly has not failed to do. Could anything be much more dramatic than the wedding morning, the happiness of bride and bridegroom as they sit by the warm hearth in contrast with the snow falling thickly without; and then the entrance of the first husband with his revelations about the plot, the bride's despair, the pistol shot, followed quickly by his suicide and her death?

And yet the book is much more clever than the play; chiefly for the reason that in the novel Ariane is much more sympathetic than in the dramatized version. As a silent sufferer from home miseries, from disgust at the meanness of her own father and the habits of her husband, her one spot of brightness is her child. When the crash comes, she refuses, in the play, to apply for a divorce because of the publicity which would affect this child—a girl. But when told that the law would give the husband power to take away her little girl and could actually make her live with him and his mistress, she at once yields and immediately consents to ask for a divorce. This is a point which seems to have escaped the critics.

Mrs. Bernard-Beere's acting in the first and the fourth acts is simply magnificent. Handicapped as she was on the first night by the fatigue of rehearsals, the strain of management; harassed by the unseemly noise made by the occupant of a private box who has had opportunities of learning how to conduct himself as a gentleman, the actress thrilled the house in each scene, and more particularly in her magnificently impassioned declamation when she addresses her scheming father and depraved first husband. Delightfully natural is her childlike cry of appreciation when Smut, the beautiful poodle, plays his well-learned trick. Her dresses are, as usual, triumphs of millinery; the tea-gown, in the first act, is made of some soft white woollen fabric which hangs in classic folds; the front is filled in from neck to feet with web-like frills of transparent crêpe lisse in pale yellow; the sleeves are made of these frills. This fluffy style suits Mrs. Bernard-Beere. The gown in which she visits the Steinbocks' studio is a triumph indeed. The outer part is precisely the tint of a wall-flower leaf with its numerous spikes of green. The inner portion, which is shown freely, is coloured like the brightest tint of a wall-flower. The contrast is admirable, and a huge bunch of shaded wall-flowers that she carries in her hand is an artistic addition to the whole. It was stated in the *World* that Mrs. Bernard-Beere wears a wig in "Ariane," but she does not. It would be foolish to cover up her beautiful hair. She never does so, except when playing in old comedies.

"Fascination," at the Vaudeville, is a play to be seen.

"The Guards' Burlesque," as played at Chelsea Barracks, has

been an enormous success, not only in the surprisingly excellent quality of the acting by the officers, but in the admirable management of the whole affair. Amateur theatricals would soon lose their stigma were all performances conducted as these have been. They were patronized by Royalty, and have been largely beneficial to the charitable cause to which the profits were applied.

"H.M.S. Pianofore" is going capitally at the Savoy. The music sounds better than ever, despite the hackneying it has endured at the hands (or rather throats) of that very dreadful kind of criminal, the amateur musician. There is a delightful "go" about the opera. The "Ticket of Leave Man" is in a fair way to run on to the end of the season at the hitherto unlucky Olympic. The fair lessee may be congratulated on the fact that the long lane has at last found a turning, and her theatre will soon emerge from the cloud that has for so many years persistently hung over it. Mr. Clynds acts in the place of Mr. Henry Neville, who now commits murder and suicide nightly at the Opera Comique.

For the little ones there is "Puss in Boots" at Drury Lane, and at Hengler's Circus a quite charming performance of "Little Red Riding Hood," supplemented by a very pretty spectacle called the Fairies' Garden Party, the guests at which are of all nations and belong to every class of life, including, as they do, Prince Bismarck, Mr. Gladstone, General Boulanger, and an Irish gentleman who dances a jig and flourishes the inevitable shillelagh.

I mentioned amateur musicians just now, and again revert to the topic, not because I love it, but because the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and no one but myself can tell how much I have suffered of late from persons who think they can sing and others who fancy they can play. Only the other day a woman, who calls herself my friend, said: "I know you are fond of music and I want you to hear Miss Blank sing." My love for music was a very good reason why I should *not* hear Miss Blank sing, and it would have been a great relief to my feelings to have said so, after having heard the hard breathing which the young lady called singing. An occasional squeal on a note beyond her register did not tend to make matters better. On such occasions I always envy Carlyle's delightful aptitude for ignoring other persons' feelings, and expressing his indignation as freely as though they were not there. Was it not he who, at a dinner party, having heard a rather ignorant person complacently betray his ignorance on some subject, said, in a dreadful pause: "Puir phantasm!" directing the withering remark to its correct destination by a glance which may be well imagined.

If only these would-be singers could be persuaded that the human voice needs a certain amount of training, they would at least be in the position of realizing their own defects and might even be set on the road to repair them. I wish they could every

one have heard the absolutely perfect manner in which Miss Liza Lehmann sang a little French *chanson* at Mr. Broadley's At Home in his charming little cottage last Friday. Her voice is deliciously sweet and true, and her method of producing it displays the highest skill. Beyond all this, there is the rare charm of expression. To hear her sing "Je t'aimerais" is a delight to the true lover of music; and I hope I shall, before long, enjoy the privilege of hearing her sing something else.

At some of our theatres, it may be gently hinted, the intervals are rather long, almost as much so as is the fashion at Parisian theatres. Hitherto we have managed these things better in England. Or is it our commercial instinct as a nation of shopkeepers breaking out in a fresh place? Could it by any possibility be a preconcerted arrangement between the management and the kindly folk who advertise on the play bills, so that the long waits may give the audience time to read about Messrs. Oetzmann's artistic furniture, Egyptian Beauty cigarettes, and the charms of Liquid Sunshine rum, which, I suppose, is the flavouring used in the excellent ices of that name which are to be had of the Horton Ice Cream Company, Queen's Road, Bayswater.

We are all looking forward to the Italian Exhibition over which Mr. Whitley is at present working so hard. He has been successful in engaging the King of Italy's co-operation, and this is an enormous step in the right direction. I wish he could induce beautiful Queen Margherita to visit the exhibition and illuminate our misty atmosphere with her gracious presence. To judge from the results of Mr. Whitley's energies at the Wild West, even this would seem to be by no means a task beyond his powers. We English all love Italy, even before we read our sweetest singer's "Casa Guidi Windows." To use her own expressive phrase, Mrs. Barrett Browning was "our Italy of women," and through her eyes we seem to see the lovely land. No one who has read her "Aurora Leigh" can quite believe that Florence has never been seen of his own very eyes; so distinctly do the poetess's word-pictures bring the city before our mental vision.

Viva Italia a Bromptonia occidentale!

With the beginning of the season come rumours of all kinds of new and delightful fashions in gowns, bonnets, coats and hats. The ateliers of Worth, Redfern, Félix, and a host of others, are alive and busy with new "notions," and the arduous task of realizing the conceptions of form and colour haunt busy brains. Even we, in our small way, can but too clearly realize the difference between a dress as it appears to our imagination and as it emerges from the hand of our maids, in these days of home-dressmaking, aided by the Scientific cutting, draping, and fitting, which has been such a boon to the owners of shallow purses.

LONDON SOCIETY.

APRIL, 1888.

THE FATAL THREE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL," "LIKE AND UNLIKE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER VIII.

"SUCH THINGS WERE."

MILDRED had been motherless for a year when that new love began to grow which was to be stronger and closer than the love of mother or father, and which was to take possession of her life hereafter and transplant her to a new soil.

How well she remembered that summer afternoon on which she and George Greswold met for the first time—she a girl of seventeen, fresh, simple-minded, untainted by that life of fashion and frivolity which she had seen only from the outside, looking on as a child at the follies of men and women—he her senior by thirteen years, and serious beyond his age. Her father and his father had been friends at the University, and it was this old Oxford friendship which was the cause of George Greswold's appearance at the Hook on that particular summer afternoon. Mr. Fausset had met him at Henley Regatta, had been moved by the memory of the past on discovering that Greswold was the son of George Ransome, of Magdalen, and had brought his friend's son home to introduce to his daughter. It was not altogether without ulterior thought, perhaps, that he introduced George Greswold into his home. He had a theory that the young men of this latter day were for the most part a weak-kneed and degenerate race; and it had seemed to him that this tall, broad-shouldered young man, with the marked features, dark eyes and powerful brow, was of a stronger type than the average bachelor.

"A pity that he is rather too old for Mildred," he said to himself, supposing that his daughter would hardly feel interested in a man who was more than five-and-twenty.

Mildred saw his face looking at her for the first time to-day in

her desolation, as she sat idly beside the lake and heard the rhythmical beat of the paddle-wheels in the distance. That grave, dark face impressed her at once with a sense of power. She did not think the stranger handsome, or fascinating, or aristocratic, or elegant, but she thought of him a great deal, and she was silent and shy in his presence, come as often as he might.

He was in mourning for his mother, to whom he had been deeply attached, and who had died within the last three months, leaving him Enderby Manor and a large fortune. His home life had not been happy. There had been an antagonism between him and his father from his boyhood upwards, and he had shaken the dust of the paternal house off his feet, and had left England to wander aimlessly, living on a small income allowed him by his mother and making a little money by literature. He was a second son, a person of no importance, except to the mother who doted upon him.

Happily for this younger son his mother was a woman of fortune, and on her death George Ransome became heir to Enderby Manor, the old house in which generations of Greswolds had been born and died since Dutch William was King of England. There had been an old house pulled down to make room for that red brick mansion, and the Greswolds had been lords of the soil since the Wars of the Roses—red rose to the heart's core, and loyal to a misfortunate king, whether Plantagenet, Tudor or Stuart.

By the conditions of his mother's will, George Ransome assumed her family name and crest, and became George Ransome Greswold in all legal documents henceforward; but he signed himself George Greswold, and was known to his friends by that name. He had not loved his father, nor his father's race.

He came to the Hook often in that glorious summer weather. At the first he was grave and silent, and seemed oppressed by sad memories; but this seemed natural in one who had so lately lost a beloved parent. Gradually the ice melted, and his manner brightened. He came without being bidden. He contrived to make himself, as it were, a member of the family, whose appearance surprised nobody. He bought a steam launch, which was always at Mr. Fausset's disposal, and Miss Fausset went everywhere with her father. She recalled those sunlit days now with every impression of the moment; the ever-growing sense of happiness; the silent delight in knowing herself beloved; the deepening reverence for the man who loved her; the limitless faith in his power of heart and brain; the confiding love which felt a protection in the mere sound of his voice. Yes, those had been happy days—the rosy dawning of a great joy that was to last until the grave, Mildred Fausset had thought; and now, after thirteen years of wedded love, they had drifted apart. Sorrow which should have drawn them nearer together had served only to divide them.

"Oh, my lamb, if you could know in your heavenly home how much your loss has cost us!" thought the mother, with the image of that beloved child before her eyes.

There had been a gloomy reserve in George Greswold's grief which had held his wife at a distance, and had wounded her sorrowful heart. He was selfish in his sorrow, forgetting that her loss was as great as his. He had bowed his head before inexorable fate, had sat down in dust and ashes and brooded over his bereavement, solitary, despairing. If he did not curse God in his anguish, it was because early teaching still prevailed, and the habits of thought he had learned in childhood were not lightly to be flung off. Upon one side of his character he was a Pagan, seeing in this affliction the hand of Nemesis, the blind and cruel avenger.

They left Switzerland in the late autumn, and wintered in Vienna, where Mr. Greswold gave himself up to study, and where neither he nor his wife took any part in the gaieties of the capital. Here they lived quietly until the spring, and then, even in the depths of his gloom, a yearning came upon George Greswold to see the home of his race, the Manor which he had loved as if it were a living thing.

"Mildred, do you think you could bear to be in the old home again?" he asked his wife suddenly one morning at breakfast.

"I could bear anything better than the life we lead here," she answered, her eyes filling with sudden tears.

"We will go back, then—yes, even if it is only to look upon our daughter's grave."

They went back to England and to Enderby Manor within a week after that conversation. They arrived at Romsey station one bright May afternoon, and found the gray horses waiting to carry them to the old house. How sad and strange it seemed to be coming home without Lola! She had always been their companion in such journeys, and her eager face and glad young voice, on the alert to recognize the first familiar points of the landscape, hill top, or tree, or cottage that indicated home, had given an air of gaiety to everyday life.

The old horses took them back to the Manor, but not the old coachman. A great change in the household had come about after Lola's funeral. George Greswold had been merciless to those servants whose carelessness had brought about that great calamity, which made seven new graves in the churchyard before all was done. He dismissed his bailiff, Mrs. Wadman and her husband, an under-dairymaid and cowman, and his housekeeper, all of whom he considered accountable for the use of that foul water from the old well—accountable inasmuch as they had given him no notice of the evil, and had exercised no care or common-sense in their management of the dairy. These he dismissed sternly, and that party feeling which rules among servants took

this severity amiss, and several other members of the household gave warning.

"Let it be a clean sweep, then," said Mr. Greswold to Bell, who announced the falling away of his old servants. "Let there be none of the old faces here when we come back next year—except yours. There will be plenty of time for you to get new people."

"A clean sweep" suited Bell's temper admirably. To engage new servants who should owe their places to her, and bow themselves down before her, was a delight to the old Irishwoman.

Thus it was that all things had a strange aspect when Mildred Greswold re-entered her old home. Even the rooms had a different air. The new servants had arranged the furniture upon new lines, not knowing that old order which had been a part of daily life.

"Let us go and look at *her* rooms first," said Mildred softly, and husband and wife went silently to the rooms in the south wing—the octagon room with its dwarf bookcases and bright bindings, its proof engravings after Landseer—pictures chosen by Lola herself. Here nothing was changed. Bell's own hands had kept all things in order. No unfamiliar touch had disturbed the relics of the dead.

Mrs. Greswold stayed in that once happy scene for nearly an hour. It was hard to realize that she and her daughter were never to be together again, they who had been almost inseparable—who had sat side by side by yonder window or yonder hearth in all the changes of the seasons. There was the piano at which they had played and sung together. The music-stand still contained the prettily-bound volumes—sonatinas by Hummel and Clementi—easy duets by Mozart, national melodies, Volks Lieder. In music the child had been in advance of her years. With the mother music was a passion, and she had imbued her daughter with her own tastes in all things. The child's nature had been a carrying on and completing of the mother's character, a development of all the mother's gifts.

She was gone, and the mother's life seemed desolate and empty—the future a blank. Never in her life had she so much needed her husband's love—active, considerate, sympathetic, and yet never had he seemed so far apart from her. It was not that he was unkind or neglectful, it was only that his heart made no movement towards hers; he was not in sympathy with her. He had wrapped himself in his grief as in a mantle; he stood aloof from her and seemed never to have understood that her sorrow was as great as his own.

He left her on the threshold of Lola's room. It might be that he could not endure the sight of those things which she looked at weeping, in an ecstasy of grief. To her that agony of touch and memory, the aspect of things that belonged to the past, seemed to bring her lost child nearer to her—it was as if she

stretched her hands across the gulf and touched those vanished hands.

"Poor piano," she sighed; "poor piano that she loved."

She touched the keys softly, playing the first few bars of "La ci darem la mano." It was the first melody they had played together, mother and child—arranged easily as a duet. Later they had sung it together, the girl's voice clear as a bird's, and seeming to need training no more than a bird's voice. These things had been, and were all over.

"What shall I do with my life?" cried the mother despairingly; "what shall I do with all the days to come—now she is gone?"

She left those rooms at last, locking the doors behind her, and went out into the garden. The grand old cedars cast their broad shadows on the lawn. The decrepit old mulberry stretched out his gnarled and crooked limbs. The rustic chairs and tables were there as in the days gone by, when that velvet turf under the cedars had been Mrs. Greswold's summer parlour. Would she sit there ever again, she wondered; could she endure to sit there without Lola?

There was a private way from the Manor gardens into the churchyard, a short cut to church by which mother and daughter had gone twice on every Sunday ever since Lola was old enough to know what Sunday meant. She went by this path in the evening stillness to visit Lola's grave.

She gathered a few rosebuds as she went.

"Buds for my bud," she murmured softly.

All was still and solemn in the old churchyard shadowed by sombre yews—a churchyard of irregular levels and moss-grown monuments inclosed by rusty iron railings, and humbler headstones of crumbling stone covered over with an orange-coloured lichen which was like vegetable rust.

The names on these were for the most part illegible, the lettering of a fashion that has passed away; but here and there a brand-new stone perked itself up among these old memorials with an assertive statement about the dead.

Lola's grave was marked by a white marble slab, with a dove in alto relievo. The inscription was of the simplest:

"Laura, the only child of George and Mildred Greswold, aged twelve."

There were no words of promise or of consolation upon the stone.

The grave was under a large mountain ash, whose white blossoms and delicate leaves made a kind of temple above the marble slab. Mildred knelt down in the shadow of the foliage, and let her head droop over the cold stone. There was a skylark singing in the blue vault high above the old Norman tower—a carol of joy and glad young life, as it seemed to Mildred, sitting in the dust. What a mockery that joyousness of springtime and nature seemed.

She knew not how long she had knelt there in silent grief when the branches rustled suddenly, as if a strong arm had parted them, and a man flung himself down heavily upon a turf-covered mound—a neglected, nameless grave—beside Lola's monument. She did not stir from her kneeling attitude, or lift her head to look at the new-comer, knowing that the mourner was her husband. She had heard his footsteps approaching, heavy and slow in the stillness of the place.

The trunk of the tree hid her from that other mourner as she knelt there. He thought himself alone, and in the abandonment of that fancied solitude he groaned aloud, as Job may have groaned sitting among ashes.

"Judgment!" he cried, "judgment!" and then after an interval of silence he cried again, "judgment!"

That one word so repeated seemed to freeze all the blood in her veins. What did it mean, that exceeding bitter cry:

"Judgment!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE IN THE CHURCH.

Two months had gone since that first visit to Lola's grave, when the husband and wife had knelt so near each other and yet so far apart in the infinite mystery of human consciousness; he with his secret thoughts and secret woes which she had never fathomed; he unaware of her neighbourhood; she chilled by a vague suspicion and sense of estrangement which had been growing upon her ever since her daughter's death.

It was summer again, the ripe, full-blown summer of mid-July. The awful anniversary of their bereavement had passed in silence and prayer. All things at Enderby looked as they had looked in the years that were gone, except the faces of the servants, which were for the most part strange. That change of the household made a great change in life to people so conservative as George Greswold and his wife; and the old home seemed so much the less like home because of that change. The Squire of Enderby felt that his popularity was lessened in the village for which he had done so much. His severe dealing with the offenders had pleased nobody, not even the sufferers from the epidemic whose losses he had avenged. He had shown himself implacable, and there were many who said he had been unjust.

"It was hard upon Wadman and his wife to be turned off after twenty years' faithful service," said the villagers. "The squire may go a long way before he'll get as good a bailiff as Muster Thomas."

For the first time since he had inherited the estate George Greswold had felt himself surrounded by an atmosphere of dis-

content, and even dislike. His tenants seemed afraid of him, and were reticent and moody when he talked to them, which he did much seldomer than of old, making a great effort over himself, in order to appear interested in their affairs.

Mildred's life during those summer weeks, while the roses were opening and all the flowers succeeding each other in a procession of loveliness, had drifted along like a slow, dull stream that flows sluggishly through a desolate swamp. There was neither beauty nor colour in her existence; there was a sense of vacuity, an aching void—nothing to hope for, nothing to look back upon, since to remember the joys of the past was to drink the cup of bitterest grief.

"If I could learn to forget, I might learn to hope," she told herself, but she had no expectation of ever learning either lesson.

She did not abandon herself slavishly to her sorrow. She tried to resume the life of duty which had once been so full of sweetness, so rich in its rewards for every service. She went about among the cottagers as of old; she visited the shabby gentilities on the fringe of the market town, the annuitants and struggling families, the poor widows and elderly spinsters, who had quite as much need of help as the cottagers, and whom it had always been her delight to encourage and sustain with friendliness and sympathy, as well as with delicate benefactions, gifts that never humiliated the recipient. She took up the thread of her work in the parish schools; she resumed her old interest in the church services and decorations, in the inevitable charity bazaar, or organ fund concert. She played her part in the parish so well that people began to say:

"Mrs. Greswold is getting over her loss."

In him the shock had left a deeper mark. His whole aspect was changed. He looked ten years older than before the coming of sorrow; and though people loved her better, they pitied him more.

"She has more occupations and pursuits to interest her," said Mr. Rollinson, the curate. "She is devoted to music—and that employs her mind."

Yes, music was her passion, but in these days of mourning even music was allied to pain. Every melody she played, every song she sang, recalled the child whose appreciation of that divine art had been far beyond her years. They had sung and played together. Often singing alone in the summer dusk, in that corner of the long drawing-room where Lola's babyish chair still stood, she had started, fancying she heard that other voice mingling with her own—the sweet, clear tones, which had sounded seraphic even upon earth.

Oh, was she with the angels now, or was it all a fable, that fond vision of a fairer world and an angelic choir, singing before the great white throne? To have lost such a child was almost to

believe in the world of seraphim and cherubim, of angels and purified spirits. Where else could she be?

Husband and wife lived together, side by side, in a sad communion that seemed to lack the spirit of unity. The outward semblance of confiding affection was there, but there was something wanting. He was very good to her—as kind, as attentive and considerate as in their first year of marriage; and yet there was something wanting.

She remembered what he had been when he came as a stranger to the Hook; and it seemed to her as if the glass of Time had been turned backwards for fourteen years, and that he was again just as he had been in those early days when she had watched him, curiously interested in his character as in a mystery. He was too grave for a man of his years—and with a shade of gloom upon him that hinted at a more than common grief. He had been subject to lapses of abstraction, as if his mind had slipped back to some unhappy past. It was only when he had fallen in love and was wholly devoted to her that the shadow passed away, and he began to feel the joyousness of life and the fervour of ardent hopes. Then the old character dropped off him like the serpent's slough, and he became as young as the youngest—boyish even in his frank felicity.

This memory of her first impressions about him was so strong with her that she could not help speaking of it one evening after dinner when she had been playing one of Beethoven's grandest adagios to him, and they were sitting in silence, she by the piano, he far away by an open window on a level with the shadowy lawn, where the great cedars rose black against the pale grey sky.

"George, do you remember my playing that adagio to you for the first time?"

"I remember you better than Beethoven. I could scarcely think of the music in those days for thinking so much of you."

"Ah, but the first time you heard me play that adagio was before you had begun to care for me—before you had cast your slough."

"What do you mean?"

"Before you had come out of your cloud of sad memories. When first you came to us you lived only in the past. I doubt if you were more than half-conscious of our existence."

She could only distinguish his profile faintly defined against the evening grey as he sat beside the window. Had she seen the expression of his face, its look of infinite pain, she would hardly have pursued the subject.

"I had but lately lost my mother," he said gravely.

"Ah, but that was a grief which you did not hide from us. You did not shrink from our sympathy there. There was some other trouble, something that belonged to a remoter past, over which you brooded in secret. Yes, George, I know you had some

secrets then—that divided us—and—and”— falteringly, with tears in her voice—“I think these old secrets are keeping us asunder now, when our grief should make us more than ever in unison.”

She had left her place by the piano, and had gone to him as she spoke, and now she was on her knees beside him, clinging to him tearfully.

“George, trust me, love me,” she pleaded.

“My beloved, do I not love you?” he protested passionately, clasping her in his arms, kissing away her tears, soothing her as if she had been a child. “My dearest and best, from the first hour I awakened to a new life in your love my truth has never wavered, my heart has never known change.”

“And yet you are changed—since our darling went—terribly changed.”

“Do you wonder that I grieve for her?”

“No, but you grieve apart—you hold yourself aloof from me.”

“If I do it is because I do not want you to share my burden, Mildred. Your sorrow may be cured, perhaps—mine never can be. Time may be merciful to you—for me time can do nothing.”

“Dearest, what hope can there be for me that you do not share—the Christian’s hope of meeting our loved one hereafter? I have no other hope.”

“I hardly know if I have that hope!” he answered slowly, with deepest despondency.

“And yet you are a Christian!”

“If to endeavour to follow Christ, the Teacher and Friend of humanity, is to be a Christian—yes.”

“And you believe in the world to come?”

“I try so to believe, Mildred; I try. Faith in the Kingdom of Heaven does not come easily to a man whose life has been ruled by the inexorable Fates. Not a word, darling; let us not talk of these things. We know no more than Socrates knew in his dungeon—no more than Roger Bacon knew in his old age—unheard, buried, forgotten. Never doubt my love, dearest. That is changeless. You and Lola were the sunshine of my life. You shall be my sunshine henceforward. I have been selfish in my silent brooding over sorrow; but it is the habit of my mind to grieve in silence—to drain the cup of affliction to the dregs. Forgive me, dear wife, forgive me.”

He clasped her in his arms, and again she felt assured of her husband’s affection; but she knew all the same that there was some sorrow in his past life which he had kept hidden from her, and which he meant her never to know.

Many a time in their happy married life she had tried to lead him to talk of his boyhood and youth. About his days at Eton and Oxford he was frank enough, but he was curiously reticent about his home life and about those years which he had spent

travelling about the Continent after he had left his father's house for good.

"I was not happy at home, Mildred," he told her one day. "My father and I did not get on together, as the phrase goes. He was very fond of my elder brother. They had the same way of thinking about most things. Randolph's marriage pleased my father, and he looked to Randolph to strengthen the position of our family, which had been considerably reduced by his own extravagance. He would have liked my mother's estate to have gone to the elder son; but she had full disposing power, and she made me her heir. This set my father against me, and there came a time when, dearly as I loved my mother, I found out that I could no longer live at home. I went out into the world, a lonely man, and I only came back to the old home after my father's death."

This was the fullest account of his family history that George Greswold had given his wife. From his reserve in speaking of his father she divined that the balance of wrong had been upon the side of the parent rather than of the son. Had a man of her husband's temper been the sinner he would have frankly confessed his errors. Of his mother he spoke with undeviating love; and he seemed to have been on friendly terms with his brother.

On the morning after that tearful talk in the twilight Mr. Greswold startled his wife from a pensive reverie as they sat at breakfast in the garden. They always breakfasted out of doors on fine summer mornings. They had made no change in old customs since their return, as some mourners might have done, hoping to blunt the keen edge of memory by an alteration in the details of life. Both knew how futile any such alteration of their surroundings would be. They remembered Lola no more vividly at Enderby than they had remembered her in Switzerland.

"My dearest, I have been thinking of you incessantly since last night, and of the loneliness of your life," George Greswold began seriously, as he sat in a low basket chair, sipping his coffee, with his favourite setter, Kassandra, at his feet; an Irish dog who had been famous for feather in days gone by, but who had insinuated herself into the family affections, and had got herself accepted as a household pet, to the ruin of her sporting qualities. Kassandra went no more with the guns. Her place was the drawing-room or the lawn.

"I can never be lonely, George, while I have you. There is no other company I can ever care about henceforward."

"Let me always be the first, dear; but you should have female companionship of some kind. Our house is empty and voiceless—there should be some young voice—some young footstep——"

"Do you mean that I ought to hire a person to run up and down stairs and laugh in the corridors, as Lola used? Oh, George, how can you?" exclaimed Mildred, beginning to cry.

"No, no, dear. I had no such thought in my mind. I was thinking of Randolph's daughter. You seemed to like her when she and her sister were here two years ago."

"Yes, she was a nice bright girl then, and my darling was pleased with her. How merry they were together, playing battledore and shuttlecock over there by the yew hedge. Don't ask me ever to see that girl again, George. It would make my heart ache."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Mildred. I was going to ask you to have her here on a good long visit. Now that Rosalind is married, Pamela has no home of her own. Rosalind and her husband like having her occasionally—for a month or six weeks at a time, but Sir Henry Mountford's house is not Pamela's home. She would soon begin to feel herself an incubus. The Mountfords are very fond of society, and just a little worldly. They would soon be tired of a girl whose presence was no direct advantage. I have been thinking that with us Pamela would never be in the way. You need not see too much of her in this big house. There would be plenty of room for her to carry on her own pursuits and amusements without boring you; and when you wanted her she would be at hand, a bright, companionable girl, who would grow fonder of you every day."

"I could not endure her fondness. I could not endure any girl's companionship. Her presence would only remind me of my loss."

"Dearest, I thought we were both agreed that as nothing can make us forget our darling, it cannot matter to us how often we are reminded of her."

"Yes, by silent, unreasoning things, like *Kassandra*," touching the dog's tawny head with a caressing hand; "or the garden—the trees and the flowers she loved—her books—her piano. Those things may remind us of our darling without hurting us; but to hear a girl's voice calling me, as she used to call me from the garden on summer mornings—to hear a girl's laughter——"

"Yes, it would be painful, love, at first. I can understand that, Mildred. But if you can benefit an orphan girl by having her here, I know your kind heart will not refuse. Let her come for a few weeks, and if her presence pains you she shall stay no longer. She shall not be invited again. I would not ask you to receive a stranger, but my brother's daughter is near me in blood."

"Let her come, George," said Mildred impulsively. "I am very selfish—thinking only of my own feelings. Let her come. How this talk of ours reminds me of something that happened when I was a child."

"What was that, Mildred?"

"You have heard me speak of Fay, my playfellow?"

"Yes."

"I remember the evening my father asked mamma to let her come to us. It seemed just now as if you were using his very works—and yet all things were different."

Mildred had told him very little about that childish sorrow of hers. She had shrunk from any allusion to the girl whose existence bore witness against her father. She, too, fond and frank as she was, had kept her own counsel—had borne the burden of a secret.

"Yes, I have heard you speak of the girl you called Fay, and of whom you must have been very fond, for the tears came into your eyes when you mentioned her. Did she live with you long?"

"Oh, no—a very short time. She was sent to school, to a finishing school at Brussels."

"Brussels!" he repeated, with a look of surprise.

"Yes. Do you know anything about Brussels schools?"

"Nothing personally. I have heard of girls educated there. And what became of your playfellow after the Brussels school?"

"I never heard."

"And you never tried to find out?"

"Yes, I asked my mother; but there was a prejudice in her mind against poor Fay. I would rather not talk about her, George."

Her vivid blush, her evident confusion, perplexed her husband. There was some kind of mystery it seemed—some family trouble in the background, or Mildred, who was all candour, would have spoken more freely.

"Then may I really invite Pamela?" he asked, after a brief silence, during which he had responded to the endearments of Kassandra, too well fed to have any design upon the dainties on the breakfast table, and only asking to be loved.

"I will write to her myself, George. Where is she?"

"Not very far off. She is at Cowes with the Mountfords, on board Sir Henry's yacht, the 'Gadfly.' You had better send your letter to the post-office, marked 'Gadfly.'"

The invitation was dispatched by the first post. Miss Greswold was asked to come to the Manor as soon as she liked, and to stay till the autumn.

The next day was Sunday, and Mr. and Mrs. Greswold went to church together by the path that led them within a stone's throw of Lola's grave.

For the first time since her daughter's death Mildred had put on a light gown. Till to-day she had worn only black. This morning she had come into the vivid sunlight in a pale grey gown of some soft, thin, lustreless silk, and a neat little grey straw bonnet with black ribbons, which set off the fairness of her skin and the sheen of her golden hair. The simple fashion of her gown became her tall, slim figure, which had lost none of the grace of girlhood. She was the prettiest and most distinguished-

looking woman in Enderby church, although there were more county families represented there upon that particular Sunday than are often to be seen in a village church.

The Manor House pew was on one side of the chancel, and commanded a full view of the nave. The first lesson was long, and while it was being read Mildred's eyes wandered idly along the faces in the nave, recognizing countenances that had been familiar to her ever since her marriage, until that listlessly wandering gaze stopped suddenly, arrested by a face that was strange.

She saw this strange face between other faces—as it were in a cleft in the block of people. She saw it at the end of a vista, with the sunlight from the chancel window full upon it—a face that impressed her as no face of a stranger had ever done before.

It looked like the face of Judas, she thought; and then in the next moment was ashamed of her foolish fancy.

“It is only the colouring, and the effect of the light upon it,” she told herself. “I am not so weak as to cherish the vulgar prejudice against that coloured hair.”

“That coloured hair” was of the colour which a man's enemies call red, and his friends auburn or chestnut. It was of that ruddy brown which Titian has immortalized in more than one Venus, and without which Potiphar's wife would be a nonentity.

The stranger wore a small pointed beard of this famous colouring. His eyes were of a reddish brown, large and luminous, his eyebrows strongly arched; his nose was a small aquiline; his brow was wide and lofty, slightly bald in front. His mouth was the only obviously objectionable feature. The lips were finely moulded, from a Greek sculptor's standpoint, and would have done for a Greek Bacchus, but the expression was at once crafty and sensual. The auburn moustache served to accentuate rather than to conceal that repellant expression. Mildred looked at him presently as he stood up for the “Te Deum.”

He was tall, for she saw his head well above the intervening rows. He looked about five-and-thirty. He had the air of being a gentleman.

“Whoever he is I hope I shall never see him again,” thought Mildred.

CHAPTER X.

THERE IS ALWAYS THE SKELETON.

WHEN Mr. and Mrs. Greswold left the church, the stranger was taking his place in the Hillersdon waggonette, a capacious vehicle, drawn by a pair of fine upstanding black-brown horses, set off by servants in smart liveries of dark brown and gold.

Mildred gave a sigh of relief. If the stranger was a visitor at

Riverdale there was not much likelihood of his staying long in the neighbourhood, or being seen again for years to come. The guests at Riverdale were generally birds of passage; and the same faces seldom appeared there twice. Mr. and Mrs. Hillersdon, of Riverdale, were famous for their extensive circle, and famous for bringing new people into the county. Some of their neighbours said it was Mr. Hillersdon who brought the people there, and that Mrs. Hillersdon had nothing to do with the visiting list; others declared that husband and wife were both equally fickle and both equally frivolous.

Riverdale was one of the finest houses within ten miles of Romsey, and it was variously described by the local gentry. It was called a delightful house, or it was called a curious house, according to the temper of the speaker. Its worst enemy could not deny that it was a splendid house—spacious, architectural, luxurious, with all the appendages of wealth and dignity—nor could its worst enemy deny its merit as one of the most hospitable houses in the county.

Notwithstanding this splendour and lavish hospitality, the local magnates did not go to Riverdale, and the Hillersdons were not received in some of the best families. Tom Hillersdon was a large landowner, a millionaire and a man of good family, but Tom Hillersdon was considered to have stranded himself in middle life by a marriage which in the outer world was spoken of vaguely as “unfortunate,” but which the strait-laced among his neighbours considered fatal. No man who had so married could hold up his head among his friends any more, no man who had so married could hope to have his wife received in decent people’s houses. In spite of which opinion prevailing among Tom Hillersdon’s oldest friends, Mrs. Hillersdon contrived to gather a good many people round her, and some of them the most distinguished in the land. She had Cabinet Ministers, men of letters and famous painters among her guests. She had plenty of women friends—of a sort; attractive women, intelligent and enlightened women; sober matrons, bread-and-butter girls; women who doted on Mrs. Hillersdon, and, strange to say, had never heard her history.

And yet Hillersdon’s wife had a history scarcely less famous than that of Cleopatra or Nell Gwynne. Louise Hillersdon was once Louise Lorraine, the young adventuress whose Irish grey eyes had set all London talking when the Great Exhibition of ’62 was still a skeleton, and when South Kensington was in its infancy. Louise Lorraine’s extravagance, and Louise Lorraine’s devotees, from German princes and English dukes downwards, had been town-talk. Her box at the opera had been the cynosure of every eye; and Paris ran mad when she drove in the Bois, or exhibited her diamonds in the Rue Lepelletier; or supped in the small hours at the Café de Paris, with the topmost strawberries in the basket. Numerous and conflicting were the versions of her early

history—the more sensational chronicles describing her as the Aphrodite of the gutter. Some people declared that she could neither read nor write, and could not stir without her amanuensis at her elbow; others affirmed that she spoke four languages, and read Greek every night with her feet on the fender, while her maid brushed her hair. The sober truth lay midway between these extremes. She was the daughter of a doctor in a line regiment; she was eminently beautiful, very ignorant and very clever. She wrote an uneducated hand, never read anything better than a sentimental novel, sang prettily, and could accompany her songs on the guitar with a good deal of dash and fire. To this may be added that she was an adept in the art of dress, had as much tact and finesse as a leader of the old French *noblesse*, and more audacity than a Parisian *cocotte* in the golden age of *cocotterie*. Such she was when Tom Hillersdon, Wiltshire squire and millionaire, swooped like an eagle upon this fair dove, and bore her off to his eerie. There was howling and gnashing of teeth among those many admirers who were all thinking seriously about making the lovely Louise a *bonâ fide* offer; and it was felt in a certain set that Tom Hillersdon had done a valiant and victorious deed; but his country friends were of one accord in the idea that Hillersdon had wrecked himself for ever.

The squire's wife came to Riverdale, and established herself there with as easy an air as if she had been a duchess. She gave herself no trouble about the county families. London was near enough for the fair Louise, and she filled her house—or Tom Hillersdon filled it—with relays of visitors from the great city. Scarcely had she been settled there a week when the local gentry were startled at seeing her sail into church with one of the most famous English statesmen in her train. Upon the Sunday after that she was attended by a great painter and a well-known savant; and besides these she had a pew full of smaller fry—a lady novelist, a fashionable actor, a celebrated Queen's counsel and a county member.

"Where does she get those men?" asked Lady Marjorie Danefeld, the Conservative member's wife; "surely they can't *all* be—reminiscences."

It had been supposed while the newly-wedded couple were on their honeymoon that the lady's arrival at Riverdale would inaugurate a reign of profanity—that Sunday would be given over to Bohemian society, *café chantant* songs, champagne and cigarette smoking. Great was the surprise of the locality, therefore, when Mrs. Hillersdon appeared in the squire's pew on Sunday morning neatly dressed, demure, nay, with an aspect of more than usual sanctity—greater still the astonishment when she reappeared in the afternoon and listened meekly to the catechizing of the school children, and to the baptism of a refractory baby; greater even yet when it was found that these pious practices were con-

tinued, that she never missed a Saint's Day service, that she had morning prayers for family and household, and that she held meetings of an evangelical character in her drawing-room, meetings at which curates from outlying parishes gathered like a flock of crows, and at which the excellence of the tea and coffee, pound cake and muffins, speedily became known to the outside world.

Happily for Tom Hillersdon these pious tendencies did not interfere with his amusements or the pleasantness of life. Riverdale was enlived by a perennial supply of lively or interesting people. Notoriety of some kind was a passport to the Hillersdons' favour. It was an indication that a man was beginning to make his mark when he was asked to Riverdale. When he had made his mark he might think twice about going. Riverdale was the paradise of budding celebrities.

So to-day, seeing this auburn-haired stranger get into the Hillersdon waggonette, Mrs. Greswold opined that he was a man who had made some kind of reputation. He could not be an actor with that beard. He was a painter, perhaps. She thought he looked like a painter.

The waggonette was full of well-dressed women and well-bred men, all with an essentially metropolitan—or cosmopolitan—air. The eighteen-carat stamp of "county" was obviously deficient. Mrs. Hillersdon had her own carriage—a barouche—which she shared with an elderly lady, who looked as correct as if she had been a bishop's wife. She was on bowing terms with Mrs. Greswold. They had met at hunt balls and charity bazaars, and at various other functions from which the wife of a local landowner can hardly be excluded—even when she has a history.

Mildred thought no more of the auburn-haired stranger after the waggonette had disappeared in a cloud of summer dust. She strolled slowly home with her husband by a walk which they had been in the habit of taking on fine Sundays after morning service, but which they had never trodden together since Lola's death. It was a round which skirted the common, and took them past a good many of the cottages, and their tenants had been wont to loiter at their gates on fine Sundays, in the hope of getting a passing word with the squire and his wife. There had been something patriarchal, or clannish, in the feeling between landlord and tenant, labourer and master, which can only prevail in a parish where the chief landowner spends the greater part of his life at home.

To-day every one was just as respectful as of old. Courtesies were as low and tones as reverential; but George Greswold and his wife felt there was a difference, all the same. A gulf had been cleft between them and their people by last summer's calamity. It was not the kindred of the dead in whom this coolness was distinguishable. The bereaved seemed drawn nearer to their squire by an affliction which had touched him too. But in Enderby

parish there was a bond of kindred which seemed to interlink the whole population. There were not above three family names in the village, and everybody was everybody else's cousin, when not a nearer relative. Thus, in dismissing his bailiff and dairy people, Mr. Greswold had given umbrage to almost all his cottagers. He was no longer regarded as a kind master. A man who could dismiss a servant after twenty years' faithful service was, in the estimation of Enderby parish, a ruthless tyrant—a master whose yoke galled every shoulder.

"Him seemed to be so fond of us all," said Luke Thomas, the village wheelwright, brother of that John Thomas who had been Mr. Greswold's bailiff, and who was now dreeing his weird in Canada; "and yet offend he and him can turn and sack yer as if yer was a thief—sweep yer off his premises like a handful o' rubbish. Faithful service don't count with he."

George Greswold felt the change from friendly gladness to cold civility. He could see the altered expression in all those familiar faces. The only sign of affection was from Mrs. Rainbow, standing at her cottage gate in decent black, with sunken cheeks worn pale by many tears. She burst out crying at the sight of Mildred Greswold, and clasped her hand in a fervour of sympathy.

"Oh, to think of your sweet young lady, ma'am! That you should lose her, as I lost my Polly," she sobbed, and the two women wept together, sisters in affliction.

"You don't think we are to blame, do you, Mrs. Rainbow?" Mildred said gently.

"No, no, indeed, ma'am. We all know it was God's will. We must kiss the rod."

"What fatalists these people are," said Greswold, as he and his wife walked homeward by the sweet-smelling common, where the heather showed purple here and there, and where the hare-bells were beginning to dance upon the wind. "Yes, it is God's will; but the name of that God is Nemesis."

Husband and wife were almost silent during luncheon. Both were depressed by that want of friendliness in those who had been to them as familiar friends. To have forfeited confidence and affection was hard when they had done so much to merit both. Mildred could but remember how she and her golden-haired daughter had gone about amongst those people, caring for all their needs, spiritual and temporal, never approaching them from the standpoint of superiority, but treating them verily as friends. She recalled long autumn afternoons in the village reading-room, when she and Lola had presided over a bevy of matrons and elderly spinsters, she reading aloud to them while they worked, Lola threading needles to save elderly eyes, sewing on buttons, indefatigable in giving help of all kinds to those village sempstresses. She had fancied that those mothers' meetings, the story-books, and the talk had brought them all into a bond of affec-

tionate sympathy; and yet one act of stern justice seemed to have loosened the bond and cancelled all obligations.

Mr. Greswold lighted a cigar after lunch, and went for a ramble in those extensive copses which were one of the charms of Enderby Manor. Miles and miles of woodland walks, dark and cool in the hottest day of summer—lonely footpaths where the master of Enderby could think his own thoughts without risk of coming face to face with any one in that leafy solitude. The Enderby copses were cherished rather for pleasure than for profit, and were allowed to grow a good deal higher and a good deal wilder and thicker than the young wood upon neighbouring estates.

Mildred went to the drawing-room and to her piano, after her husband her chief companion and confidante now that Lola was gone. Music was her passion—the only art that moved her deeply, and to sit alone wandering from number to number of Beethoven and Mozart, Bach or Mendelssohn, was the very luxury of loneliness.

Adhering in all things to the rule that Sunday was not as other days, she had her library of sacred music apart from other volumes, and it was sacred music only which she played on Sundays. Her *répertoire* was large, and she roamed at will among the classic masters of the last two hundred years, but for sacred music, Bach and Mozart were her favourites.

She was playing a gloria by the latter composer, when she heard a carriage drive past the windows, and looked up just in time to catch a glimpse of a profile that startled her with a sudden sense of strangeness and familiarity. The carriage was a light T cart driven by a groom in the Hillersdon livery.

A visitor from Hillersdon was a novelty, for, although George Greswold and Tom Hillersdon were friendly in the hunting-field, Riverdale and the Manor were not on visiting terms. The visit was for her husband, Mildred concluded, and she went on playing.

The door was opened by the new footman, who announced "Mr. Castellani."

Mrs. Greswold rose from the piano to find herself face to face with the man whose countenance, seen in the distance, in the light of the east window, had reminded her of Judas. Seen as she saw him now, in the softer light of the afternoon, standing before her with a deprecating air in her own drawing-room, the stranger looked altogether different, and she thought he had a pleasing expression.

He was above the middle height, slim, well-dressed in a subdued metropolitan style, and he had an air of distinction and elegance which would have marked him anywhere as a creature apart from the common herd. It was not an English manner. There was a supple grace in his movements which suggested a southern origin. There was a pleading look in the full brown eyes, which suggested an emotional temperament.

"An Italian, no doubt," thought Mildred, taking this southern gracefulness in conjunction with the southern name.

She wondered on what pretence this stranger had called, and what could be his motive for coming.

"Mrs. Greswold, I have to apologize humbly for presenting myself without having first sent you my credentials and waited for your permission to call," he said in very perfect English, with only the slightest Milanese accent, and then he handed Mrs. Greswold an unsealed letter which he had taken from his breast pocket.

She glanced at it hastily, not a little embarrassed by the situation. The letter was from an intimate friend, an amateur *littérateur*, who wrote graceful sonnets and gave pleasant parties.

"I need not excuse myself, my dear friend, for making Mr. Castellani known to you in the flesh, as I have no doubt he is already familiar to you in the spirit. He is the anonymous author of 'Nepenthe,' the book that *almost every one* has been reading, and *quite every one* has been talking about this season. Only the few can *understand* it; but you are of those few, and I feel assured your *deepest* feelings have been stirred by that *wondrous* work. How delicious it must be with you among green lanes and English meadows. We go to a land of extinct volcanoes for my poor husband's gout. *A vous de cœur*,

"DIANA TOMKISON."

"Pray sit down," said Mildred, as she finished her gushing friend's note, "my husband will be in presently; I hope in time to see you."

"Pardon me if, in all humility, I say it is *you* I was especially anxious to see, to know, if it were possible—delightful as it will be also to know Mr. Greswold. It is with your name that my past associations are interwoven."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"It is a long story, Mrs. Greswold. To explain the association I must refer to the remote past. My grandfather was in the silk trade, like your grandfather."

Mildred blushed. The assertion came upon her like an unpleasant surprise—it was a shock. That great house of silk merchants from which her father's wealth had been derived had hardly ever been mentioned in her presence. Lord Castle-Connor's daughter had never grown out of the idea that all trade is odious, and *her* daughter had almost forgotten that her father had ever been in trade.

"Yes, when the house of Fausset was in its infancy the house of Felix and Sons, silk manufacturers and silk merchants, was one of the largest on the hill-side of old Lyons. My great-grandfather was one of the richest men in Lyons, and he was able to help the

clever young Englishman, your grandfather, who came into his house as corresponding clerk, to perfect himself in the French language, and to find out what the silk trade was worth. He had a small capital, and when he had learnt something about the trade, he established himself near St. Paul's Churchyard as a wholesale trader in a very small way. He had no looms of his own in those days; and it was the great house of Felix, and the credit given him by that house, which enabled him to hold his own and to make a fortune. When your father began life, the house of Felix was on the wane. Your grandfather had established a manufactory of his own at Lyons. Felix and Sons had grown old-fashioned. They had forgotten to march with the times. They had allowed themselves to go to sleep, and they were on the verge of bankruptcy when your father came to their rescue with a loan which enabled them to tide over their difficulties. They had a lesson, and they profited by it. The house of Felix recovered its ascendancy, and the loan was repaid before your father retired from business."

"I'm not surprised to hear that my father was generous. I should have been slow to believe that he could have been ungrateful," said Mildred softly.

"Your name is among my earliest recollections," pursued Castellani. "My mother was educated at a convent at Roehampton, and she was very fond of England and English people. The first journey I can distinctly remember was a journey to London, which occurred when I was nine years old. I remember my father and mother talking about Mr. Fausset. She had known him when she was a little girl, and he used to stay in her father's house when he came to Lyons on business. She would like to have seen him and his wife and daughter, for old times' sake; but she had been told that his wife was a lady of rank, and that he had broken off all associations with his trading career. She was too diffident to intrude herself upon her father's old ally. One day our carriage passed yours in the park. Yes, I saw you, a golden-haired child—yes, madam, saw you with these eyes—and the vision has stayed with me, a sunny remembrance of my own childhood. I can see that fair child's face in this room to-day."

"You should have seen my daughter," faltered Mildred sadly.

"You have a daughter?" said the stranger eagerly.

"I *had* a daughter. She is gone. I only put off my black gown yesterday—but my heart and mind will wear mourning for her till I go to my grave."

"Ah, madam, how deeply I sympathize with such a grief," murmured Castellani.

He had a voice of peculiar depth and beauty—one of those rare voices whose every tone is music. The pathos and compassion in those few common-place words moved Mildred to sudden tears. She commanded herself with an effort.

"I am much interested in your reminiscences," she said cheerfully. "My father was very dear to me. My mother came of an old Irish family, and the Irish, as you know, are apt to be over proud of high birth. I had never heard my father's commercial life spoken about until to-day. I only knew him as an idle man, without business cares of any kind, able to take life pleasantly. He used to spend two or three months of every year under this roof. It was a terrible blow to me when we lost him six years ago, and I think my husband mourned him almost as deeply as I did. But tell me about your book. Are you really the author of 'Nepenthe,' that nameless author who has been so much discussed?"

"And who has been identified with so many distinguished people—Mr. Gladstone—Cardinal Newman."

"Mr. Froude—Mr. Browning—I have heard all kinds of speculations. And is it really you?"

"Yes, it is I. To you I may plead guilty, since, unfortunately, the authorship of 'Nepenthe' is now *le secret de Polichinelle*."

"It is a—strange book," said Mildred. "My husband and I were both interested in it—and impressed by it. But your book saddened us both. You seem to believe in nothing."

"'Seems,' madam, nay, I know not 'seems;' but perhaps I am not so bad as you think me. I am of Hamlet's temper, inquiring rather than disbelieving. To live is to doubt. And I own that I have seen enough of this life to discover that the richest gift that Fate can give to man is the gift of forgetfulness."

"I cannot think that. I would not forget, even if I could. It would be treason to forget the beloved ones we have lost."

"Ah, Mrs. Greswold, most men have worse memories than the memory of the dead. The wounds we want healed are deeper than those made by death. His scars we can afford to look upon. There are wounds that have gone deeper and that leave an uglier mark."

There was a pause. Mr. Castellani made no sign of departure. He evidently intended to wait for the squire's return. Through the open windows of a second drawing-room, divided from the first by an archway, they could see the servants setting out the tea table on the lawn. A Turkey carpet was spread under the cedar, and there were basket chairs of various shapes, and two or three small wicker tables, of different colours, and a milking stool or two, and all the indications of outdoor life. The one thing missing was that aerial figure clad in white which had been wont to flit about among the dancing shadows of branch and blossom—a creature as evanescent as they, it seemed to that mourning mother who remembered her to-day.

"Are you staying long at Riverdale?" asked Mildred presently, by way of conversation.

"If Mrs. Hillersdon would be good enough to have me I would

stay another fortnight. The place is perfect, the surrounding scenery enchanting, and my hostess simply delightful."

"You like her?" asked Mildred, interested.

No woman can help being curious about a woman with such a history as Mrs. Hillersdon's. All the elements of romance and mystery seem, from the feminine standpoint, to concentrate in such a career. How many hearts has such a woman broken, how many lives has she ruined, how often has she been on the brink of madness or suicide? she, the placid matron, with her fat carriage horses, and powdered footmen, and big prayer book, and demure behaviour, and altogether *bourgeoise* surroundings.

"Like her, yes; she is such a clever woman."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, she is a marvel. The very cleverest woman I know."

He laid a stress on the superlative. His praise might mean anything—might be a hidden sneer. He might praise as the devil prays—backwards. Mildred had an uncomfortable feeling that he was not in earnest.

"Have you known her long?" she asked.

"Not very long. Only this season. I am told that she is fickle, or that other people are fickle, and that she seldom knows any one more than a season. But I do not mean to be fickle, I mean to be a house-friend at Riverdale all my life if she will let me. She is a very clever woman—and thoroughly artistic."

Mildred had not quite grasped the modern significance of this last word.

"Does Mrs. Hillersdon paint?" she asked.

"No, she does not paint."

"She plays—or sings, I suppose?"

"No. I am told she once sang Spanish ballads with a guitar accompaniment; but the people who remember her singing tell me that her arms were the chief feature in the performance. Her arms are lovely, to this day. No, she neither paints, nor plays, nor sings; but she is supremely artistic. She dresses—well, as few women of five-and-forty know how to dress—dresses so as to make one think five-and-forty the most perfect age for a woman; and she has a marvellous appreciation of art, of painting, of poetry, of acting, of music. She is almost the only woman to whom I have ever played Beethoven who has seemed to me thoroughly *simpatica*."

"Ah," exclaimed Mildred surprised, "you yourself play, then?"

"It is hardly a merit in me," answered Castellani modestly; "my father was one of the finest musicians of his time in Italy."

"Indeed!"

"You are naturally surprised. His genius was poorly appreciated. His name was hardly known out of Milan and Brussels. Strange to say, those stolid Flemings appreciated him. His work

was over the heads of the vulgar public. He saw such men as Verdi and Gounod triumphant, while he remained obscure."

"But surely you admire Verdi and Gounod?"

"In their places, yes; both are admirable; but my father's place was in a higher rank of composers. But let me not plague you about him. He is dead—and forgotten. He died crownless. I heard you playing Mozart's 'Gloria' as I came in. You like Mozart?"

"I adore him."

"Yes, I know there are still people who like his music. Chopin did; asked for it on his death-bed," said Castellani with a wry face—as if he were talking of a vulgar propensity for *sauerkraut* or a morbid hankering for *assafoetida*.

"How I wish you would play something while we are waiting for my husband," said Mildred, seeing her visitor's gaze wandering to the open piano.

"If you will go into the garden and take your tea, I will play with delight while you are taking it. I doubt if I could play to you in cold blood. I know you are critical."

"And you think I am not *simpatica*," retorted Mildred, laughing at him. She was quite at her ease with him already, all thought of that Judas face in the church being forgotten. His half deferential, half caressing manner; his easy confidences about himself and his own tastes, had made her more familiar with his individuality in the space of an hour than she would have been with the average Englishman in a month. She did not know whether she liked or disliked him; but he amused her, and it was a new sensation for her to feel amused.

She sauntered softly out to the lawn, and he began to play.

Heavens, what a touch! Was it really *her* piano which answered with tones so exquisite—which gave forth such thrilling melody? He played an improvised arrangement of Schubert's Ave Maria, and she stood entranced till the last dying *arpeggio* melted into silence. No one could doubt that he came of a race gifted in music.

"Pray don't leave the piano," she said softly, from her place by the open window.

"I will play till you call me away," he answered, as he began Chopin's Etude in C sharp minor.

That weird and impassioned composition reached its close just as George Greswold approached from a little gate on the other side of the lawn. Mildred went to meet him, and Castellani left the piano and came out of the window to be presented to his host.

(To be continued.)

BOYCOTTING.

By S. LAING,

AUTHOR OF "MODERN SCIENCE AND MODERN THOUGHT," "A MODERN ZOROASTRIAN," ETC., ETC.

MAX MÜLLER'S theories of the formation of language often receive a singular confirmation from the way in which some new word, casually dropped into a medium fitted to receive it, becomes the centre of a whole crystallization of ideas and feelings. Thus the name of the versatile chancellor, Henry Brougham, whose figure loomed so large in the eyes of the last generation as an orator and politician, is identified by the present one with a convenient one-horse vehicle, which unites comfort with economy, and by its mere mention conveys a sense of genteel respectability. The world has advanced since Carlyle coined his famous epithet of "gig-manity," as the definition accepted by the average British mind as synonymous with respectability, and nowadays keeping a brougham affords a better solution of the much-vexed question, "Ought we to call on her?"

In no instance, however, has the acceptance of a word been so sudden and universal as in that of the word which forms the subject of this article. Not five years ago, a retired captain, unknown to fame, was living in a remote county in Ireland. The land troubles, which are at the root of the Irish question, and have been smouldering there for centuries, happened to break out into one of their periodical fits of active eruption in the captain's county, and he, being, as I understand, implicated on the unpopular side, as agent for some absentee landlord, became obnoxious to the surrounding population. In the good old days of Capt. Rock the difference would have been settled by a shot from a blunderbuss behind a wall, and a return shot of rifle or revolver from a dog-cart. There would have been either a captain or a moonlighter less in the world. The London newspapers would have had a sensational paragraph headed "Irish outrage," and very probably leading articles in the several party organs, each trying to fix on the other the charge of complicity with crime. But dead or alive the captain's name would have been forgotten in a fortnight. See, however, how differently things may happen. Fifty years of National schools have educated the Irish tenantry up to a point where they can carry on their perennial war against rack-renting landlords in a more

civilized and efficacious manner than by shooting at an odd agent or bailiff, and getting hanged for it. They have studied the history of their native isle, and noted how its patron saint, St. Patrick, dealt with the animals which he found obnoxious. He did not attempt to use physical force, but resorted to moral coercion. In a word, he "boycotted" the snakes and toads so vigorously that they found it impossible to live on Irish soil.

There you have the celebrated word at last. To "boycot" carries its own meaning with it in senates and congresses, wherever the English tongue is written or spoken, and even further, in the chambers of the Vatican the question whether to condemn or absolve it exercises popes and cardinals. The reason is obvious. The word sums up concisely a vast variety of ideas and facts, many of them as old as the hills, many the products of modern civilization, and many so complex, so interwoven, and going down so deep into the first principles of morals and society, that a long periphrasis would be required to define them with any approach to accuracy. When the conditions of the age brought one or two forms of the thing within the range of practical politics, the necessity for a word to express it became urgent. Our worthy captain supplied the word, and like the "right man, who does the right thing at the right time," his name has achieved immortality.

There is just one drawback to the advantage of coining a word of this description, that by narrowing a number of complex things into one focus, it assists narrow minds in taking a narrow view of them. Thus there are many Conservatives to whom the word "boycot" conveys no other idea than that of a conspiracy of wicked Parnellites and Gladstonians to embarrass the best of all possible governments. "Eave arf a brick at 'em," in the form of coercion, is the verdict of a majority of West End clubs and London journalists. On the other hand there are Liberals in whose minds the word means a conspiracy of Primrose dames to ruin some Radical fishmonger who dares to give an honest vote against the parson and the squire. This narrowness of view, and incapacity for seeing more than one side of a question, and that a very minute one distorted by prejudice, is the besetting failing of our English race. Here also a word has been coined which exactly expresses it, though why the ancient dwellers in Palestine, the land of palms on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, should have given rise to such an association of ideas as attaches to the term "Philistine," is not easy to conceive. Be this as it may, the term has come to have a very distinct meaning, as any one may see who will read Matthew Arnold's denunciations of it, and I am sorry to say that I cannot but to a considerable extent agree with him, and admit that with many excellent qualities, the average British citizen of the upper and middle classes is often apt to be an "awful Philistine."

Nine-tenths of our domestic squabbles and Foreign, Irish and colonial difficulties arise simply from this incapacity to "see ourselves as others see us," put ourselves in other people's places, and understand that there may be two sides to every question.

It may be useful, therefore, to take this burning question of boycotting out of the sphere of vulgar party recrimination, and endeavour to treat it as a scientific question of the definition and development of a very universal and fundamental phase of human nature.

To begin with the definition. What is boycotting? A combination to exert influence by moral means. Clearly there must be combination. If I individually cut an obnoxious member of my club, it is not boycotting; but if I concert with other members who feel as I do, to make the club too hot for him, it is a clear case of boycott. Again, it is equally clear that the means employed must be moral, and not physical. The Spanish inquisitors did not boycott heretics, they burnt them. The Birmingham mob did not boycott Priestley, they sacked his house. This clearly defines the line at which legislation ought to step in. Whenever moral influence degenerates into physical violence, it must be sternly repressed. The indignation one feels at conduct like that of a Langworthy or a Clanricarde may be ever so righteous, but if it translates itself into punching their heads if I meet them in the street, I should be properly arrested by the police and imprisoned for assault. The doubtful cases only begin when boycotting is confined to moral coercion.

Now as to this, it is to be observed, in the first place, that though the name is new, the practice of boycotting is one of very ancient and universal existence. Society in the East is based on caste, which is a very rigid boycott; the Jews boycotted the Samaritans; the Christians until quite recently boycotted the Jews; every club, every regiment, boycotts obnoxious members; until quite recently land boycotted trade, and exclusive dowagers drew their indignant skirts together if the wife of a manufacturer profaned the sacred circle. Nay, I have even known a little coterie of empty-headed, supercilious swells boycott a downright good fellow at the covert side, because his boots were not precisely of the shade or his breeches of the cut which Lord Tomnoddy considered to be the correct thing. Such pranks of folly may be dismissed with a smile of contemptuous pity, but there are at the present day two forms of boycott which have a real and practical importance—the trades union boycott and the Irish boycott. The two cases are the same in principle: combinations of the weak against the strong. In the conflicts which arise between capital and labour for the adjustment of wages, it is evident that working-men would go to the wall if they could be taken like the bundle of sticks, separately, and starved into accepting any wages the masters chose to offer. Their remedy is the trades union and strike, which enables them

to carry on the war in something like equal terms, and inflict on their employers a loss somewhat corresponding to that which they suffer themselves from a prolonged contest. But the efficacy of the strike depends very much on whether the employer can find other hands to work his mine or factory. If he can, the strikers are beaten; if not, the master probably has to give way. Hence the whole influence of the men on strike and of the trades union to which they belong, is exerted to prevent new hands from coming in and taking the work. They get black looks, are denounced as traitors to their order, and in a word, are severely boycotted.

Ought this to be prevented by law? An appeal to practical experience shows that it is far better for law to confine itself to preventing outrage. The old harsh law of England, which was entirely onesided in supporting the rich against the poor, threw its whole weight into the scale of the capitalist, and under the guise of the legal fiction that trades unions were in restraint of trade, did all that it could to deliver labour, bound hand and foot, into the power of capital. The result was that the war was carried on to a great extent by outrages, and those whose memory extends back for half a century, will remember how vitriol throwing at Glasgow, rattening at Sheffield, swing fires in agricultural counties, and other periodical outbreaks, furnished constant themes for newspapers and novels. But the workmen got votes, public opinion became more humane, and the old unjust laws were repealed and trades unions legalized. No one can doubt that there has been an immense improvement. Sliding scales, boards of conciliation and arbitration, have to a great extent superseded strikes, and when strikes do occur they are far less frequently attended by violence and outrage. Wages have risen, a better feeling prevails, and no one who compares the present state of things in England with that of forty or fifty years ago, or of Continental countries where repression is still in force, can doubt that unlimited liberty of combination and of moral coercion, has asserted its right to live by the best of all tests—that of the survival of the fittest.

But the application of this principle to Ireland is one of the burning questions of the day, for it affects too many political prejudices and party interests to be discussed dispassionately. "Surely you do not approve of boycotting!" said a lady to me the other day. She was an intelligent and well-read lady, so I replied by the Baconian aphorism, *Dolus versatur in generalibus*: "Give me a specific instance, and I will give you a specific answer; but if you want a general yes or no, you must apply to some one who is either a heated political partizan, or a hide-bound British Philistine."

I have seen a good deal of Irish boycotts in my time, and I can truly say that there are some which I call good, and would have

supported heartily if I had been a resident in Ireland; others which I call bad, and would without hesitation have condemned. To understand this one must begin at the beginning, and explain how boycotting arose in Ireland and what it really means. The root of the Irish land question lies in the fact that the bulk of the population are small tenants who have been for generations rack-rented on their own improvements. I blame no one for this state of things, but simply state it as a fact. The real crux of the question lies in this—"Is it or is it not right to rent tenants on their own improvements?" Those who think it right approve, as a matter of course, of strong measures to suppress any attempts to force landlords to reduce rents. Those who think it wrong, equally as a matter of course, approve all measures short of outrage, which bring pressure on landlords to make reasonable compromises to meet the twofold fact of the original rents being levied on improvements, and the reduction of prices having made them impossible. In a great majority of cases such compromises are made, but there are a few instances in which landlords, like Lord Clanricarde, hold out, and a state of social war results. The landlord fights with great advantages, for he has the law, the police, and the army at his back to enforce evictions for arrears of the old unjust and impossible rents. The tenants have nothing to oppose to this but a combination to starve the landlord out by preventing him from getting any rent until he agrees to a compromise. It is precisely the same thing as a battle between strike and lock-out in the cotton or coal districts. In each case it is evident that the men's chance of winning turns mainly on the question whether the master or landlord, as the case may be, can get outsiders to work the mines or take the farms. If he can he is bound to win; if he cannot he is pretty sure to be starved into surrender. Hence you may be sure that in either case the weaker party, whether they are called Welsh miners or Irish tenants, and whether their combination is called a trades union or a National League, will do all they can to prevent desertions from their own body and to keep away outsiders. The chief difference is this: that in Ireland the boycott is a far more effectual weapon than in England, where it is difficult to isolate individuals in the midst of a population of different classes and interests; while, on the other hand, the landlords' weapon of eviction is a far sharper one, for loss of employment to an English working man hardly ever signifies such a sentence of death as eviction does to a poor Irish tenant with absolutely no resource but to die in a ditch.

With this preface I can give some approximate answer to the question, what I consider good and what bad boycotts. I consider all boycotts bad where the landlord has been willing to make such reasonable reductions of rents and arrears as other fairly good landlords were giving. I have never yet heard of such a case, for in all that I have known or read of such compromises

have invariably been accepted, and where the dispute has been fought out to the bitter end the Land Commissioners have given larger reductions than were asked for by the Plan of Campaign. But there may be such cases, and if so I entirely condemn them. So also I do cases in which the boycott has been worked as an engine of private pique or persecution.

Now for a good boycott. Take the case of Widow Hogan, which I saw with my own eyes at Bodyke last autumn. Her husband held two small farms, together fourteen acres, at the exorbitant rent of £20 a year. He died about three years ago, and the widow pleaded hard to be allowed to give up one farm and retain the other, so as to keep a roof of the cottage her husband had built over the heads of her six young children. The answer was eviction, and she was flung out on the roadside and is living on charity in a little hut built for her by the neighbours.

In this case the holdings were what is called in the South Sea Islands "taboed," and from that day to this no one has thought of taking them; they lie waste, and the landlord has never received a penny of rent for them. This I call a righteous boycott, and if I, living in the neighbourhood, had not supported it, I should have felt that some of the Scriptural curses on the oppressors of the widow and the fatherless would have properly fallen on my head.

This is a sample of what I consider a legitimate boycott. In all cases where tyrannical landlords try to extort rents plainly unreasonable by evictions, I think it is not only the right but the duty of every one in the district to band together and by every means in their power, short of outrage, assist the tenants in fighting their uphill battle. I would do just the same for the poor needlewomen of the East End of London if I saw them striking with any rational chance of success against some extra-extortionate sweater.

I will conclude by giving one or two instances of boycotting which I have come across in Ireland, and which may give the reader some idea of how the thing works in practice. In a certain small town there were two rival publicans whom I will call Murphy and Sullivan. Sullivan was a great Nationalist, Murphy a quiet little man who did not care to meddle with politics. It so happened that they both rented small farms from the great landlord of the district, and that Sullivan sub-let part of his at an enhanced rent to Murphy. A dispute arose between the landlord and his tenantry, who struck and refused to pay rent till they got a reduction. Murphy paid his rent, Sullivan did not, but he sued Murphy for the excess rent due on his sub-lease, and not content with this, he conceived the bright idea of getting the whole whiskey trade of the place by inducing the League to boycott Murphy. But Murphy knew a trick worth two of that. He suddenly developed into a full-blown Nationalist, subscribed to the League and applied to the council for a decree of boycott

against Sullivan, for suing a brother Leaguer for a rent in excess of that which he was himself refusing to pay.

This masterly move checkmated Sullivan, and the result was that the two boycotts were considered like the two Kilkenny cats, to have eaten each other up to the tips of the tails, and things returned to the *status quo ante*.

Another more serious instance may show both the power and the persistency of the boycott in cases where there is no suspicion of outrage, and where it would be impossible for any legislation to reach it.

On a certain estate war broke out between landlord and tenant on a question of giving a reduction of about 25 or 30 per cent. I believe that this would have been a fair reduction, and that the landlord would have given it, but the estate was in Chancery, and two elderly spinsters who had charges on it refused to agree to any abatement. So the tenants struck and the estate was boycotted. Now it happened that a great part of its value arose from some extremely rich grass meadows, which the landlord kept in his own hands, making about £1,000 a year by the hay, which he sold to the neighbouring farmers to their great convenience as it enabled them to supplement their own rough hay and keep a better stock. But when the boycott was decreed not a soul in the county could be got to cut the hay, and after a long delay the landlord imported a lot of emergency men to do the work. These men were for the most part roughs from the large towns who knew nothing of field work and whose one idea was to earn their 15s. or 20s. a week with as little exertion as possible. The season was already late and the weather set in wet, so the result was that the hay was so badly made that it could not pay for the expense of sending it to a distant market, and being boycotted, no one would buy it near home. The landlord therefore not only lost his £1,000, but he had to pay a large sum for barracks for his emergency men to live in and for policemen to guard them, for providing them with necessaries, and paying them wages at the rate of two men's pay for half a man's work. I believe the balance came out so much on the wrong side that the attempt was not repeated, and the estate has ever since been losing the best part of this £1,000 a year, owing to the obstinacy of these two old maiden ladies.

There may be two opinions whether it would be right to suppress a boycott like this if it were possible, but there can be no second opinion that the attempt would be perfectly futile. You cannot imprison the whole population of a country side because they refuse to make or to buy another man's hay. In short the result of a good deal of experience and reflection about the matter is, that you must do as you have done in the case of trades unions—that is, limit the intervention of the criminal law to acts of violence. If you attempt to carry it further you will inevitably

end in making the law either ridiculous or odious, or very probably both at once. Thus in a case which occurred recently in Ireland a little girl of fourteen was sent to goal for a fortnight for saying "Boo" to an emergency man. Could anything be more ridiculous? You might just as well have sent her to gaol for saying "Bo" to a goose. But at the same time the case has a serious aspect. What would be the feeling of the cotton spinners of Bolton or Preston if, when they were out on strike, the little girl of one of their comrades had been sent to gaol by a justice who was a cousin of the millowner for hooting a man who had been brought in from a distance to work in the factory? Would it have made them feel more loyal and law-abiding and less disposed to listen to the harangues of socialist orators? For Lancashire, read Clare or Limerick, and you may safely predict that what is human nature in the one will be human nature in the other. If this truth could once be driven into the head of the British Philistine, the Irish question would be advanced a long step towards solution.

“DEAR LADY DOROTHY!”

By THE HONOURABLE MRS. H. W. CHETWYND,

AUTHOR OF “A MARCH VIOLET,” “SARA,” ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THERE never was a brighter, prettier, or more charming girl than Lady Dorothy de Châteaurond, the only daughter of the Earl of Belesbond. She was, as her name testified, of Norman descent, the only peculiarity in the family history being that, till within the last generation or so, they had not been ostensibly noble, and the glare of public opinion not having fallen upon them, they were comparatively obscure till the first peer had obliged George the Fourth in some way, and he had been rewarded by a peerage, a pedigree and a name. Belesbond was said to have been a *sobriquet* in uncontradictable “olden times” of Bel et Bon, given by the Conqueror, and Châteaurond meant the old tower (long since destroyed) from which some arrow or weapon had done good service in Normandy to the said Conqueror.

People are so very ill-natured, and prominence occasionally creates jealousy, so nobody need believe that Belus Bond, a money-lender, of great acuteness and of a rotund size, gave his name to the peerage, and that a quip about his feline propensities and his rotund person, *chat tout rond*, originated the family name.

What does it matter? The peerage was a fact; and was not the birth and parentage in all the pride’s Bibles of the day? Let those laugh who win, thought the family.

At any rate Lady Dorothy laughed; and charming in repose, she was enchanting when she laughed. Her father and her grandfather had followed the universal law, they had spent what *the* first peer had made, and Lady Dorothy, an only daughter, had six brothers.

It was a matter of sincerest congratulation that Lady Dorothy in her first season had won the affections of a rich young squire, a Mr. Eldred, a man of pure, good Saxon descent, of a very old untitled family, whose lands had belonged to one or other branch for many generations before the Conquest; a family who had wisely given sons to commerce, who had been always steady,

clever, full of integrity—proud in a right way of their name—and against whose escutcheon no slur had ever been placed. Young Eldred was rich, devotedly in love, and Lady Dorothy consented to be his wife without concealing the fact that she also was happy and much in love with him. In short she pleased herself, and all her family at the same time—a delightful thing since she hated being found fault with—and no one had a fault to find. In these days, when so many young men disoblige their families by their marriages, and so many young women follow suit, the family was much to be congratulated.

With equal good fortune, Mr. Eldred having no brothers, no cousins near or dear to him, and his large family properties being entailed and tied up by all sorts of puzzling legal documents on heirs male, Lady Dorothy, as fast as nature permitted such a feat, presented three sons to the enraptured family.

A deep sense of gratitude towards her for this judicious conduct filled all hearts (except, of course, that of the cousin and heir-at-law).

"Dear Lady Dorothy somehow always does the right thing," was the family verdict, and she was praised and petted and admired more than ever. At the time of her marriage her chief friend Lydia Haverill (a connection) had, of course, without meaning it, sown the only discomfort in Lady Dorothy's mind.

No family of any antiquity can avoid having branches and collaterals of less consequence than the parent stem—a very old family necessarily has these roots and branches, just as old oaks and elms have ramifications and branches above, and roots and fibres below the ground, spreading in all directions. It is only your newly-planted tree, with its clean, pert uprightness, that has no branches to speak of.

John Eldred had many more cousins than he could count; though his warm, good heart would willingly have counted them all. Among them was a certain Lady Malyn, a cousin of his father's, a woman who had intellect and an opinion of her own. She was a widow and childless, her only son having married and died and left half-a-dozen children and their mother to her care.

Lady Malyn's husband had been one of the unrecognized geniuses who invent things for the good of posterity, and whose abilities are often discovered too late. Sir Henry Malyn had worn himself out, as such men sometimes do. He had been made a knight, and had the greater part of the alphabet after his name. He died, regretting only that he could not live to complete a new instrument, and that he was leaving the wife who had been the sharer of his every thought, and the comforter of his every trouble, to mourn him.

Lady Malyn, living with a daughter-in-law and the six grandchildren, who were all fond of her, but all a little afraid of her, grew

careless in her dress, and gave herself up to a task she loved, the arranging and editing of her husband's papers.

Young Mrs. Malyn never noticed her mother-in-law's dress, and if she had, would never have ventured to remonstrate; and Lady Malyn got into the habit of wearing out clothes that should have been worn out months before, carried a very old pair of gloves in her hands, put on a bonnet peculiarly out of fashion; and when she paid a visit of ceremony, wore an Indian shawl that had seen better days. Now some Indian shawls are beautiful possessions, but there are some which are a little gorgeous for promenading, and Lady Malyn's was a still vivid scarlet worked in gold, valuable in itself and cherished by her, since her husband for years had saved to buy this shawl before he had been in a position to marry her; the shawl was full of the tenderest memories to her, almost a sacred thing, and she put it on, when she wore black, or purple, or grey, without any regard to the sensitive feelings on the subject of “tints,” which so universally prevails in these highly enlightened days.

It was with regard to Lady Malyn that Lydia Haverill had been distinctly disagreeable.

Lady Malyn had been to see Dorothy, and Miss Haverill had been present, and the old lady had put the young one down—cleverly and not rudely, but Lydia had not liked it.

“No happiness but has its drawbacks, my poor dear Dolly!” she said, before Lady Malyn was well out of the room. “That I should live to see my beautiful Dorothy calling a woman like that cousin!”

“Do you know, I rather like her, Lydia.”

“Like her! A woman in a violent purple gown and that fearful thing like a table cloth gone mad upon her back.”

“Her dress was very ugly, but she has rather a nice face.”

“Oh, Dolly! Where is your taste? *You* so dainty, so picturesque, so particular. You must be joking!”

Some friends came in, and Lydia held forth amidst fits of laughter about the prospective cousin, gown and shawl, and all else.

Poor Dorothy, feeling in her heart of hearts disloyal to her future husband, was overwhelmed; had a quarrel (her first) with Lydia, made friends, and with all the injustice of an impetuous young person of nineteen, declared she hated Lady Malyn because her dearest friend and she had quarrelled about her.

Poor Dorothy! She had weakly yielded, and knew little peace afterwards. Lady Malyn was a discordant note, and now she always joined in making fun of her and her clothes; and finally grew to think of her as a distinct drawback, almost her *bête noire*.

Time had not smoothed matters; Lady Malyn never flattered, and to speak the truth, Dorothy was accustomed to flattery, so much used to it that she felt an honest contradiction, even a difference of opinion, to be a distinct rudeness; a state of mind very easily

engendered. The mother of three beautiful boys, a devoted wife, amiable, affectionate, willing to be pleased, with a rich and devoted husband, who studied her in everything, she smiled upon her world; and as the world in this respect is very like a looking-glass, it smiled back upon her; an exception was an annoyance. Mr. Eldred thought no fairer picture could be seen than his Dorothy, when he went up as usual to her dressing-room the beginning of August, and found her in a bewitching tea gown, seated with the year-old boy on her lap, displaying a good deal of his person, and kicking with immense energy—the elder boys assisting in the worship of the youngest, and making a great deal of noise.

Sooner than usual that evening, the picture became a dissolving view; though the young father, who had something on his mind, praised and petted the children rather more than usual. Hypocritical man! For the first time in his married life he had something to tell his Dorothy—and he knew that she would not like to hear it.

He took up that position on the hearthrug which invariably appears to give courage to mankind, and cleared his throat of imaginary huskiness. “Darling,” he began, “I have had an invitation; Murray goes north next week; he has taken the very best shooting in Ross-shire, a moor where grouse is said to be unusually plentiful and . . .”

“I am so glad,” and Lady Dorothy sprang to her feet. “I have never been quite to the north of Scotland, and I have often longed to go; and the children—not that they are ill—but Highland air will be delightful for them. Can’t you see the little rogues rolling in the heather?”

Mr. Eldred gave a little cough. “I am afraid, my dearest little wife, that there is no chance of that; a shooting lodge has such very limited accommodation.”

Lady Dorothy’s countenance fell. She was silent for a minute or two, then she looked up bravely: “I must not be foolish. . . . I don’t *like* leaving the children, dearest husband, but my first duty is to you. Of course I will leave them, and nurse will write every day. But my things. I suppose I must be ready at once. This is the third of August; you will wish to be there for the twelfth. A tweed gown, thick boots, a hat. Well, darling, don’t be afraid; I shall be quite ready.”

She sat down and had ordered her gown on paper, down to the buttons (she was nothing if not practical), when her husband spoke again.

“You see, dear, it is only a shooting lodge—very small, and Murray has asked no ladies.”

“I shan’t be at all dull, dear. I have some new work, and I shall try and sketch. Sometimes I can go out with you. I really don’t think I mind a gun at all. If it makes a very big noise I can always stop my ears.”

Mr. Eldred put his arm round her shoulder. “I am afraid, dear Dolly, you will not like it—but the truth is, Murray’s quarters are only for bachelors, and *if* I go, I am to go alone.”

Poor Lady Dorothy! She tore up her note in minute portions, and felt vindictive towards Mr. Murray. She sat down without speaking, and gazed moodily into the fire.

Mr. Eldred looked at her with a strangely uncomfortable feeling. “Dolly,” he said, gently raising her chin with his big brown hand, “if you dislike my going I shall give it up.”

“But you wish it?”

“Of course I do—it is a great piece of luck for me.”

“Then go, dear,” she said, mastering her feeling of annoyance, and speaking in her own natural manner.

Mr. Eldred was delighted with her consent and with her manner of consenting, and told her what a perfect little wife she was; and she reflected with much self-praise that she had been very nice. “Some wives might have been very nasty,” she thought, and said so to herself.

“Should you like to stay here or go anywhere else with the children?”

“Oh, stay here. I hate a seaside lodging.”

“You might go to Lynmouth to our cottage there.”

“And have *that* Lady Malyn on my shoulders at all hours of the day—no, thanks.”

“Lady Malyn is a very good and a very clever woman, if you would only not be so obstinate about it, dear, and so prejudiced.”

“Lady Malyn is a vulgar, tiresome, interfering woman—and I . . . hate her!”

“My dear Dorothy, this is too bad. I really cannot understand your dislike to her, and she is my cousin,” and Mr. Eldred, as head of his house, was offended, but he saw his Dorothy’s blue eyes looking tearful and hastened to drop the subject. “Will you ask any one here?”

“Lydia Haverill might come perhaps.”

“Whom I dislike nearly (not quite as much) as she dislikes me. Well, dear Dolly, do as you like; you have been very good about my going away; I only want to make sure you will not be too dull; please yourself.”

“Why do you dislike Lydia?”

“Because she flatters you so dreadfully.”

“Flattery according to my definition is insincere praise; Lydia never says what she does not mean.”

“Flattery, I consider, is praise, exaggerated praise before you, to your face. I hate hearing her say, ‘Dear Lady Dorothy! how sweet! how lovely you are! no one is like you, &c.,’ it makes my little wife look very——”

“Well, finish your sentence,” cried Lady Dolly, half laughing, half angry.

"Well, very foolish, as if she thought it pleased you."

"Oh!" and Lady Dorothy went off to her dressing-room without saying a word, more ruffled than she cared to show; there was a truth she did not like in this speech of her husband's. It is much easier to forgive a small injustice, than a truth which wounds our vanity.

Also the Cottage at Lynmouth was full of convenience, and to be by the sea would be so pleasant. It began to look pleasanter than ever to her thoughts as the days grew very hot, and their own big place in Hampshire was so big when her husband was away, and there was no doubt it stood a little low, and every time Lady Dorothy felt the heat, she felt more aggrieved by Lady Malyn's presence near the exquisite grounds and the sea breezes at Lynmouth.

"Life is not a bed of roses," she said to herself as she laid her head upon her pillow. She had declared the Cottage to be impossible, she had made herself a voluntary exile; it followed naturally that it immediately became a desirable thing.

CHAPTER II.

THE parting was over, Lady Dorothy had felt it a good deal. She went into her husband's room with quite a forlorn little feeling of being deserted, put a few things tidy for him on his writing table, and began a most elaborate pair of slippers for him, which, as she detested work, and the pattern was high art, sad in colour, and fearfully intricate, ran the smallest possible chance of completion.

She sent for her eldest child, talked quite over his head and bored him a good deal, by dwelling upon self-denial and sterling qualities, till he got so dull that with tears in his eyes he begged to go to the nursery.

"May I go to the nursery now? I have been good. Nurse said I might go to the nursery soon if I was good."

"Oh, Percy! Are you not happier with mother?"

"No, I'm happier in the nursery to-day—and we are going to have toast for tea, and I'm going to help to make it if I've been good. I have been good."

He gave her a quick, careless hug and ran away merrily.

His mother sighed and went off in the carriage to meet Miss Lydia Haverill.

Even at that hour, nearly five, it was oppressively hot; the train, a local one, was unpunctual and the horses fidgeted, of which the coachman made the most; altogether Lady Dorothy had time to get ruffled before Miss Haverill appeared.

When she finally arrived, it was quite evident she also had been ruffled, and as she was not very well bred and was not on ceremony with Lady Dorothy, she was distinctly cross, and only the

luxurious tea ready at home saved the situation. Tea, however, does restore people's tempers, and by the time she had invested her appetite in various hot cakes and scones and drank several cups of tea, Lydia was as gushing as ever and expressed her astonishment and her delight in having her “dearest Dorothy” all to herself, making the most of the astonishment.

“I was so surprised,” she said; “fancy you two inseparables parting of your own accord for weeks and months!”

“Not for quite so long as that.”

“Well, the shooting season; of course that is a vague term. I can quite understand being glad to get a man away for a bit, but I can not imagine Mr. Eldred, *the* man envied of all men, voluntarily going away from so lovely and so delightful a wife and those cherub boys.”

“A man may love his home and yet like good shooting.”

“Evidently; but if I was married, what a rage I should be in if my husband preferred his gun and men friends to my society; I should never forgive him. You, Dorothy, are an angel.”

Was it because of her husband's words, or because the realities of life taught to all women by motherhood had opened Lady Dorothy's eyes? She disliked this speech and did think it flattery. With a graver face than usual she said gently:

“I know you wish to be kind, but I think you flatter me too much, Lydia; it makes me look foolish. Even my husband thinks so.”

“Does he? Do you really believe that I flatter you? Oh! dear Lady Dorothy!”

“Well, you don't mean it. I know you are sincere; I told my husband so.”

“So he thought me insincere.”

“I am not sure he put it so, but he thinks you flatter me. No, I think I defined flattery as insincere praise. We did not agree about it.”

“And I caused a disagreement! dearest and sweetest Dorothy, how can you forgive me!”

“There is nothing to forgive. Percy has not been quite well this evening; I am going to see him, so I will say good night, dear. I do hope you will be quite comfortable,” and Lady Dorothy kissed her friend and left her.

“So Mr. Eldred is trying to keep dear Dorothy from liking me. Well, I shall pay him out,” and Lydia went to bed in a very aggressive state of mind.

Next morning, over their work, Lydia began to talk about her journey.

“Who do you suppose came as far as the junction with me?”

“I cannot imagine,” said Lady Dorothy, who was puzzling over two shades of green.

“Those two Miss Thorpes—those would-be beauties.”

"I remember two very handsome Miss Thorpes; nice, pleasant girls they seemed," said Lady Dorothy.

"*Men* like them. Well; they and their boxes—such a quantity of luggage!—went down to Scotland by the express. Some place in Ross-shire; Craig Vohr was on all their luggage."

"How very odd. Craig Vohr is Mr. Murray's shooting. I address my husband's letters there."

"There may be two Craig Vohrs."

"In Ross-shire? Not likely, is it?"

"Not likely—but Scotch things are always so exceptionally different from one's rational ideas, when one thinks of forests without trees; it all sounds so eccentric."

Lady Dorothy said nothing. If it was true that these girls were going to Craig Vohr in Ross-shire, Mr. Murray had played her false, and womankind was to be there. Not for one moment did she believe her husband had purposely misled her.

"My husband told me it was a bachelors' party."

"A bachelors' party! Dear Lady Dorothy, you are too sweet!" and Lydia threw herself back, laughing heartily.

"Well, it really does not matter," the little wife said loyally.

"Because you are too wonderfully nice and good! How any young man can, of his own free will, leave such a wife. . . . You know you are quite the best wife in the world, dear Lady Dorothy."

"I have the best and kindest husband. What is it, Thomas? Anything wrong?" as her own footman came noiselessly forward, mystery on all his features.

"Mrs. Todd, my lady, if convenient—urgent." Lady Dorothy hurried to the door, only half hearing Thomas's message.

Mrs. Todd, an excellent family servant, had cause for uneasiness. A housemaid, ill for a week, had developed scarlet-fever. The doctor was there, and would also like a word with her ladyship. He was not kept waiting, and Lady Dorothy had foreseen what would follow. Take the children away. Yes; but where to go? Eastbourne, Brighton—where?

"Lodgings are risky just now, and good ones hard to find. Could you not go to some place of your own—any seaside place? Mr. Eldred has other places besides this one, I know."

Half unconsciously "Lynmouth" came from Lady Dorothy's lips.

"The very place!" exclaimed Dr. Croly. "Have things got ready and go the first thing to-morrow."

"It is my fate," said Lady Dorothy to herself, half amused and wholly anxious.

But she gave all the orders before returning to the boudoir—every one was at once busy. And having settled who she could take, and arranged for the comfort of the sick girl, she rejoined Lydia.

"Anything wrong?" asked that young person.

"Yes; something is very wrong. One of the housemaids has scarlet fever, and we must all go to-morrow to Lynmouth."

"What a bore! Servants always seem to be catching things."

"Will you tell your maid about packing? I want to go by an early train."

"Dear Lady Dorothy!" and Miss Haverill stood at the door for a moment.

"Well?" asked the busy little woman, whose pen was flying along the paper, telling her husband what had happened.

"Your husband will *hate* having to leave a *bachelors' party*."

"Why should he? He can do no good. *We* are not ill."

"Dear Lady Dorothy——!" and the door closed upon the would-be mischief-maker.

That night brought no relief to the sick housemaid; but the three boys, their mother and necessary attendants were by noon next day established at the Cottage. The unpacking kept every one busy, or made them think themselves so. Lady Malyn called in a couple of days, and was hurt at hearing "Not at home" pronounced quite aloud by a voice from the drawing-room. Lady Dorothy would have seen her, but Miss Haverill was so very sure she would rather not, that she weakly yielded. Afterwards her face used to burn when she remembered it. But we must not anticipate.

In the meantime Lydia Haverill watched from behind the curtain, and made merry over the shawl and all else, and Lady Dorothy's naturally good heart and good breeding again took exception and Miss Haverill saw it.

"Dear Lady Dorothy, I am not offending you?"

"I don't like it, Lydia."

"Do you know you are changing very much. If I had known how much, I should hardly have come to you."

"I hope I'm not unkind."

"Not unkind; but you do not care for me as you once did."

Lady Dorothy coloured. "If you were married and had children you would understand."

"Dear Lady Dorothy!"

"And you are changed. You always say 'Lady' Dorothy."

"Because you are strange, somehow. However, it is always the same; a man never likes his wife's girl friends; then they have to go."

"Pray do not talk nonsense. And here is Percy; we must not talk of all this before him."

Percy was in a fretful and tiresome mood, and tried his mother's patience a good deal. Miss Haverill made him irritating little speeches, and at last declared he ought to be well whipped. He burst into tears. Lady Dorothy was angry with him, and annoyed with her friend. Was she her friend? The doubt came well

before her; but Percy was sent to the nursery as a naughty boy, and went, unable to explain all the feelings of penitence and the sensation of illness that was making his little heart so full.

Luckily the nurse, an experienced and motherly woman, saw the child was ill. She deposed the baby, gave Percy a warm bath, and kept him by her all night.

It was very early in the morning when she woke Lady Dorothy. "Master Percy is not at all well, my lady."

To dress in something quickly and go to his side—to note the flushed face and the eager cry for something to drink. . . .

"The doctor——" she stammered anxiously.

"He is sent for, my lady."

He came, and a short examination showed him it was scarlet fever.

Poor Lady Dorothy! She went to Lydia's room and told her, sure of her help, saying, "Will you keep the little ones by you, Lydia? I must be by Percy, he is very ill."

"I keep the little ones! dear Lady Dorothy. I am the most helpless person alive, and I honestly say I do not care for children."

"Only for to-day, Lydia. I have telegraphed for the house-keeper. I cannot trust baby to the nurserymaid, and nurse must not go near them."

"Dear Lady Dorothy, you really can hardly be serious, proposing so selfish a plan. Suppose I catch the fever—there are all my visits at an end. I never heard anything so selfish. I shall pack and go at once—quite the kindest thing I can do!"

"But you have had scarlet fever."

"People may have it twice. Good-bye, dear Lady Dorothy. Better not shake hands, for fear of accidents."

Lady Dorothy turned away, and shortly heard her depart. She felt terribly forlorn. She could not look after the little ones, and every time they cried she was *sure* there was some grievous catastrophe going on. She suffered acutely. Then came cheerful sounds—baby was laughing. Soon a twisted note came up to her:

"DEAR LADY DOROTHY,

"As you cannot be in two places at once, and must not, of course, leave your sick boy, may I take the little ones to my house? I have spent some time with them, and we are good friends already. You shall hear every day.

"G. MALYN."

How Lady Dorothy thanked her! The little ones went off, and the house was quiet—terribly quiet, the poor young mother thought. Inexperience adds to all the natural fears at such a time.

The hours seemed terribly long, and the child grew worse. Delirium came on, and the cry was always about that last afternoon; somebody threatening to whip him—the last important event of the little life was photographed on his brain.

When her husband arrived, the poor mother was nearly beside herself and looked, to his anxious eyes, as though she would follow the child. The doctors summoned from far and near gave small hope at last; and there came a time when they had to tell the father the child must die. “If he was older and could understand and could take stimulants. We have tried everything, and he is sinking. It would be cruel not to tell his mother the truth.”

Lady Dorothy, kneeling by the bed, heard, and her heart fainted within her. Her Percy! her lovely, strong, healthy boy dying!

A low, firm, sweet-toned voice came into the stillness, “A healthy child, sinking? Nonsense, my dear doctors. God does not give a young life and then let it die. Oh! I know you are very clever; you know all about diseases; but I never knew a doctor yet that *really* knew all about children; they have a wonderful hold on life.”

Could Lady Dorothy ever forget that voice, and the strong, firm hands that raised the child’s head; how the stimulants she had coaxed him to take in vain and the nurse had tried to *make* him take were obediently taken from those hands under the influence of a gentle firmness he could not resist, even half-conscious as he was; how through many hours the kindly face watched by that bed, and at every proper interval without a demur Percy swallowed what was given? Could anything ever make Lady Dorothy forget the first conscious look, the murmured “Mother!” and the clasp of her hand with the sweet sleep that followed?

At that time all was as a dream to Lady Dorothy, she was chiefly conscious of clinging to a kind arm, and of trying to utter her incoherent thanks.

Percy recovered, and the delight of Lady Dorothy’s life was when she carried that figure she had so learned to love; when the purple gown and *that* shawl were in the carriage beside her, and they were going home together.

* * * * *

Weeks afterwards Mr. Eldred said to his wife, “I always forgot to tell you. I saw the two Miss Thorpes one day in the Highlands.”

“One day?”

“Yes; they were staying at Craig Vohr Castle, on the opposite side of the Loch, and we met at a sort of picnic one day.”

“I heard they had gone north,” and Lady Dorothy was glad in her heart she had not been led into doing her husband injustice.

“Darling husband!” she said fervently, “I want to confess to

you. You were right and I was wrong about Lydia; she was very unkind and very selfish."

"Ah! so you found her out?"

"And you were right and I was wrong about dear Lady Malyn. It is not only about Percy, but every day I love her better. She has shown me a side of life I knew nothing of, and given me an interest in books and things I was ignorant of. I shall be a better mother to my boys, and I hope a better wife——"

"No; there you may stop," he exclaimed. "I am glad you appreciate Lady Malyn and that she is of use to you. I am glad I shall not soon again hear 'Dear Lady Dorothy' from lips I know to be false, but I want no change in you—I only want you always to be yourself."

HONOUR'S DUE,

TO THE HEROINE OF BUNKER'S SPRUIT.

Who was this, the sorrowing brave
Bear to a triumphant grave,
There, where England's colours wave
O'er a soldier's burial?

What!—a woman? Yes! for when
Afric's sun saw Englishmen
Die unyielding, one 'gainst ten,
She did nobler than they all.

Next her husband, to the ground
Smitten by a cureless wound,
Helpless, and a prisoner bound,
Yet she rose with hopeful cheer.

Willing feet her strength sustain
By her comrades, sunk in pain;
Theirs her life, till nature wane,
Crushed by pangs from year to year.

Seven summers' bright increase
To her anguish brought no cease—
Now all mourn her, laid at peace,
On a warrior's martial bier.

Roll the drums, through winter air,
Flash the volleys! they who bear,
For a sister's tender care
Blessing her with many a tear.

Honour her with honour's due!
England's Queen and people knew
What a woman's heart can do,
When her noble tale was told.

With her badge of the Red Cross
Let her rest—not hers the loss.
Who hath changed our earthly dross
For the crown of fadeless gold.

A LIFE INTEREST.

By MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOOING O'T," "AT BAY," "BY WOMAN'S WIT,"
"MONA'S CHOICE," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CLOUDS BREAK.

THAT letter to his son cost Philip Cranston infinite pain. The whole night long he pondered what effect his confession would have on Dick's truthful, straightforward mind. Hitherto the young man's evident liking for him and confidence in him had been inexpressibly cheering; now, he dreaded falling in his estimation.

The first glance at his fine expressive face would tell how he had taken this revelation; even the expected answer might convey it, for Cranston thought he should be able to read between the lines.

Yet he was glad it was done, that his son knew the truth. No matter how urgent, how imploring the mother who had treated him so cruelly might be, she could not undo what had been done.

Cranston felt weak, unnerved, unequal to the impending interview with his wife, and waited her coming with impatience, eager to have it over.

Then he might be free to go back to his boy, if his reply was all he hoped for. If not, well—he could think of no alternative.

But the weary hours of that terrible morning rolled on, and again Mrs. Acland failed to keep her appointment.

This greatly puzzled Cranston. It was of the last importance to her to confer with him, and it would be something very unusual for her to be foiled in her purpose twice. He was at a loss what to do. He did not like to make inquiries at her house, lest he might meet Acland. He dared not write. Perplexed and uneasy he resolved to wait till after nightfall, and if she did not appear, to seek his cousin Captain Cranston at the Minerva Club, as he no longer need avoid the haunts of men—the men he used to know—and take counsel with the scientific sailor.

Captain Cranston was not at his club, however; he had had a telegram that afternoon which had obliged him to go out of town,

and he had left no address. Philip meditated on this information as he walked slowly back to his remote lodgings.

Had the summons been to the vindictive old man who clung so tenaciously to his rank and riches, and was he ill or dying? Was Dick to find a father and fortune at one stroke?

"It is ill coveting dead men's shoes, when I am rejoicing over a living son," thought Cranston, resolutely turning from a pleasant fancy sketch of Dick installed as master of Leighton Abbot, and doing credit to his name and race. "There is nothing for it but patience. I daresay Hugh will write to me; I cannot hear from Dick at the earliest before Tuesday evening, and that is more than sixty hours off; I must get through them as best I can."

It was a trying interval. Mrs. Acland made no sign, and Cranston scarcely liked to leave the house lest he might miss some communication from her. On Tuesday morning came a few lines from Captain Hugh. Mr. Maynard had insisted on driving without an overcoat in an open carriage, had walked a considerable distance to inspect the progress of some farm buildings he had begun for a new tenant; a sudden storm had come on, and before he could reach shelter the old man was drenched; next day he had a severe feverish cold which soon became bronchitis, and he was then in a very precarious condition, having been weakened previously by his excessive grief for the loss of his grandson.

"I think," continued the writer, "it would be well if you made yourself known to Messrs. Thorpe and Son, Lincoln's Inn, my uncle's solicitors; I inclose a line of introduction. They ought to know of your existence, and might be useful to you in many ways. My own opinion is that the poor old man cannot pull through, though the doctors say it is possible he may recover. Atwell, the great chest doctor, came down this afternoon, and approves what the other men have done."

"No," said Philip Cranston as he slowly put the letter back in its envelope. "I will not trouble the lawyers while the poor fellow lives; it will not make any difference, especially as Hugh is ready to acknowledge me. I will stick to the house till I get Dick's answer."

"The day drags on though storms keep out the sun;" and this long spell of weary waiting came to an end. Cranston had lit the gas, and opened a book with a desperate intention of attending to it, when a letter was handed to him. At sight of the address his cheek grew pale and his long slender hands trembled; he hesitated to open it and paused before he hastily tore off the envelope and with a beating heart read the contents eagerly, thirstily; then he sank into a chair murmuring, "Thank God! thank God!" and in the silence and solitude of his quiet room he covered up his face and wept. He had a son then!—a son who loved him already, who was ready to condone his offences, and compassionate the sorrows which he had partly brought upon himself. How he

longed to press the boy he had learned to love so much to his heart—English though he was, to show him to his friendly cousin Hugh, to boast of him to the whole world!

But the conclusion of the letter demanded his attention. "I have just heard that my mother has met with a serious accident, and Mr. Acland has sent for Marjory; pray ascertain what it is, and come down as soon as possible. I long to see you and consult with you; we have a difficult and trying task before us."

"This complicates matters," was Cranston's reflection, when he was able to divert his thoughts from Dick. "It would have been better for herself had she been saved by death from what is before her!"

Late as it was Cranston sallied forth, and hailing a cab was soon set down at the door where he had recognized his wife in the beginning of this true history.

He rang the bell, and waited anxiously for some minutes before it was answered.

"Is Mr. Acland at home?"

"No; master's away at the hospital."

"Then could I see Miss Acland?"

"I am sure I do not know; she is in sad trouble."

"Pray give her my card."

"I don't think she will see you," said the girl. "Step inside."

In another moment she came back, and in a changed tone said, "Please walk into the dining-room, sir. Miss Acland will be down directly." The room was oppressive; a solitary gaslight made its darkness visible; the fire burned low.

Cranston stood by the table, thinking of the terrible confusion he was about to bring upon the innocent family; of the shameful story he was compelled to tell. Marjory at least need not know the whole of it. But she was beside him, with a sad, grave face.

"Oh, Mr. Brand! I am so glad you have come! Have you heard of the dreadful accident to Mrs. Acland?"

"Dick has written to me to inquire particulars, so I ventured to intrude upon you."

"I do not know much myself; my father is in such distress that he could scarcely speak to me. It seems that on Friday afternoon Mrs. Acland had gone out to send a telegram to nurse, who is with the children at Folkestone. I suppose she went to shop after, for crossing one of the streets leading out of Edgware Road, a cart coming round the corner knocked her down; she was taken up much bruised and insensible, so they carried her to the hospital. The doctors are afraid the spine has been injured, and that she may be paralyzed in the lower limbs. She cannot be moved yet, and my poor father is always going to the hospital, though he is not allowed to see her. She was so dreadfully agitated the first time he went. They say she will be quite

helpless; think what a fate for such an active, masterful woman!"

"It is appalling!" exclaimed Cranston, deeply shocked. How cruel it would be to attack a prostrate helpless creature whose sufferings demanded forbearance!

"You used to know her, and Dick's father?" resumed Marjory. "Was he really so bad as Mrs. Acland makes out?"

"I was rather partial to him," returned Cranston gravely; "so I may not be a fair judge, but he did not seem a bad fellow to me."

"I am sure he was not, or Dick would not be as nice as he is," said Marjory thoughtfully. "I hope you are going back to him soon, Mr. Brand. You will be a comfort to him; he is so fond of you."

"Is he?" said Cranston, with a happy smile.

"Yes, indeed he is; and you will let George come to you in the evening too, I hope, as I shall not be able to leave my father for a long time, I fear. He was so dependent on Mrs. Acland. I do not not know what will become of him. When she can come home I am sure she will wish me away; she never could bear me; and now she has been so suddenly struck down I feel ashamed of disliking her so much."

"I do not think you have reason to be ashamed of yourself. It is, however, probable I may remain in town some time longer; perhaps Dick may join me. Meanwhile, should Mrs. Acland wish to see me, I will leave my address with you."

"Do you think she might wish to see *you*?" asked Marjory, with such evident surprise that Cranston felt she had heard Mrs. Acland express an unfavourable opinion of him.

"She may find it necessary to confer with me respecting some matters—but I have trespassed too long on you."

"I wish you could stay—or that I could ask you to stay," said Marjory, blushing and hesitating. "It is awfully lonely—the children are away, and it is better to keep them away. My poor father does not seem to know what to do. I think it is a comfort to him to find me here when he comes in. I will write to Dick to-night and tell him you have been here."

"Do so. Good-night, my dear young lady!" He stooped and kissed her hand in a tender, fatherly fashion that touched her; the tears sprang to her eyes. "Good-bye, I am so glad to have seen you." He left the house, and walked on in the deepest perplexity.

What was to be done! It might be better to break his painful tidings to Acland while it was impossible for the unfortunate woman to interfere, and arrange some plan for her future when she was able to be moved. On one point he was resolved: she should confess the truth respecting the money he was convinced she had taken. Should he attempt to see her in the hospital, or first lay his statement before Mr. Acland? He could come to no decision.

Meanwhile, the wretched woman who occupied his thoughts had, as her mind recovered its powers, gone down into a hell of anticipated shame and exposure. She knew she was powerless to move—absolutely at the mercy of her foes. She knew the weakness of the man she had ruled and dominated; that he was only a broken reed; and if he listened to Cranston and believed him, as he must, his horror of scandal, of being a nine days' wonder, the subject of newspaper paragraphs, would turn him too against her. Her only hope of mercy was from the husband she had despised and driven away. She felt that life was over for her, and she would fain have ended it, but lacked the physical power that would have given courage enough to do the deed. Her mental condition did not escape the notice of the doctors, who told Mr. Acland that his wife's recovery, so far as she could recover, was retarded by her evident uneasiness, and exhorted him to ascertain, and if possible to remove, the cause.

The cause was clear enough to Mr. Acland. All could be accounted for by the dreadful threats of Blake.

His own fears prompted him to buy the rascal's silence, to do anything to avoid the horror of publicity. But how to trace him was the question? He had left no address, and any attempt to discover his whereabouts might only lead to his apprehension. Still Mr. Acland hoped that his necessities would compel him to apply once more either to Mrs. Acland or to himself. Nor was he mistaken. The fifth day after the accident he was almost rejoiced to receive a short note signed "B." the writing of which was well known to him. It stated that the writer, being penniless, had determined to give himself up to the police, and reveal everything, if within the next week he was not furnished with funds to fly the country.

"I will not endanger myself by going to you," he continued, "but I will keep indoors for the next three or four days, and you must come here. Ask for Mr. Eisenberg. If you have any sense, we will soon settle matters."

This effusion bore the address, "Schmitt's Coffee House, Crown Street, Prince's Road, Kensington."

Mr. Acland did not hesitate an instant in deciding to keep the appointment. He hurried away to the hospital, where his wife had been placed in a private room, and surrounded with all that skill and care could do to alleviate her sufferings. He would show her the note, and assure her that he would buy off the needy scoundrel whose venom they both dreaded. Mrs. Acland had now recovered from the stunning effect of the shock she had received. Her bruises were less painful, and she did not suffer any acute pain; she even began to hope that the terrible numbness which made her lower limbs inert might not prove incurable. She had been at first exceedingly averse to see her husband; his presence

exercised a peculiarly disturbing effect upon her; but now she asked constantly for him, and he was always ready to sit by her, and listen to her moans and complaints.

Having begged the nurse to leave them for a few minutes, he read Blake's note aloud in a hushed tone, and proceeded to assure his eager listener that he was determined to arrange matters so as to free her from all apprehension in future.

"I trust you may be able to do so, but it would be wiser to defy him. I leave all to you; I only wish I were not to be a burden to any one," she returned feebly.

"Do not talk like that, my dear; the doctor says you are doing wonderfully well. We must hope the best."

"Ah! we must. See," moving her hands on the coverlet, "my hands are quite right. I think I could use a pencil—give me yours, and that note." She began to scribble on the back of it. "Yes, I can write—that is something. I wish you would leave me both the note and pencil. I have a few ideas I should like to note down as to what you shall say to Blake, and they come so slowly."

"But I am afraid you may let the note be seen."

"Trust me," she returned smiling grimly.

"Let me take the address," said Mr. Acland, much perplexed. He did not dream of refusing his wife, yet he dreaded the note being seen, and he was impatient to get the interview with Blake over. "I should like to have seen him to-day, if possible."

"Better not. He will be more ready to come to terms if you keep him waiting."

"Well, perhaps so. I am afraid I am staying too long."

"It does not seem long," she said softly. "I wish, dear, you would give me a little money. The day nurse has been peculiarly good to me; I should like to make her a present."

"Certainly." He gave her a sovereign and some silver.

"Thank you; I suppose I must let you go. Be sure you call to-night or to-morrow for 'my ideas.'"

As soon as he was gone, and nurse installed with her needle-work beside the fire, Mrs. Acland asked very quietly, "Have you any envelopes, nurse?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Will you fetch me one?"

"Law! ma'am, you do not want to write a letter?"

"Oh, no," smiling, "only to inclose one Mr. Acland has forgotten."

"Very well," and nurse left the room.

She returned in a few minutes, and handed an envelope to her patient. "There," said Mrs. Acland, smiling sweetly as she slipped Blake's note into it, "see how well I can write," and she addressed it to Cranston's Camden Town lodgings. "Now," she added, "get a stamp and post this at once, if you would

insure me a quiet day. Here, take this to pay for the postage and for—*discretion*."

"Dear me, ma'am," said nurse hesitating and eyeing the sovereign, "I hope as how I am not doing any wrong."

"That is my affair. Go, take it instantly; it is on my husband's business." Her tone of command imposed on her attendant, who left the room. When she returned, the patient appeared to be in a profound slumber.

* * * * *

The few words Marjory had spoken to him dwelt in Philip Cranston's mind, and seemed to run through the tangle of his perplexed thoughts like a pleasant strain of music. What a sweet sympathetic voice the gipsy had! what bright, steadfast eyes! How fond she was of Dick! and *he*—did he himself know how he loved her? To Cranston's experience, the condition of his son's heart had long been perceptible, but how would the matter end? He was not sure of Marjory, and when the true state of affairs became known to Acland he might very naturally refuse any further connection with a man who had been fatal to him. Well, the solution of this and many other difficulties could not be anticipated.

He wrote to Dick thanking him for his prompt and affectionate reply, and advised him to give up his present employment or ask for leave of absence, as his presence in town might be necessary. He gave him the particulars of his interview with Marjory, and described the nature of the accident to Mrs. Acland.

Then he resigned himself to wait, nor was it long before the curtain drew up on the last act of the drama.

The following morning brought him no tidings of the wretched woman he knew was burning to see him, and he was debating whether he should attempt, with Marjory's help, to see her, when a telegram was laid before him.

"My uncle died, rather suddenly at the last, this morning about five-thirty. Have written to Thorpe that you will call to-morrow before noon."

The paper fell from Cranston's hand, and for a few minutes he strove in vain to realize the immense change in his fortunes. Gradually, as his ideas cleared, he felt that one difficulty, want of money, was removed. For this he was thankful, otherwise no sense of exultation swelled his heart for a moment. He hated poverty, its ugliness, its privations; he loved the power of *giving*; but as to rank and riches with their accompanying parade, their irksome necessity for being constantly in gala costume, he hated them also.

"I wish the poor old fellow had not disliked me so much; I fancy he thought me even blacker than I was painted! Well, Dick must play the part of the noble squire, and pay the penalties

of wealth and position, while he gives me a corner of the big house to paint and smoke in. If this had come a few years sooner, how Judith would have queened it as Mrs. Cranston Maynard of Leighton Abbot. Ah! few women ever had so stony a heart, so iron a will as she has. I wonder if she will recover? If determination could compel and conquer nature she would rise up from her bed to make the most out of the present crisis." While he reflected, Cranston prepared to set forth and keep the appointment Hugh had made for him.

The details of the meeting with the family solicitor would lengthen this chapter too much. Philip Cranston found that his cousin had prepared the legal mind of Mr. Thorpe for his claims. The highly respectable solicitor himself had had some dealings with the nephew of his old client years ago, and though he was so changed recognized him, the more readily because Captain Cranston had no doubt of his identity.

"It is fortunate," said the sedate punctilious lawyer, "that your cousin's recognition and admission of your claims preclude any necessity for litigation. These cases of disputed identity are most tedious, costly and uncertain. Captain Cranston is a man of most honourable principles, and I am sure you will be glad to know that your late uncle has bequeathed him the whole of his very large savings. Our excellent client lived very quietly of late, and you will find the estate perfectly free from debt or incumbrance of any kind. Indeed, his administration of the estate has been admirable—most admirable;" he sighed as he repeated this note of admiration.

"Ah!" returned Cranston with a smile, "I see you fear for its management in my hands. My dear sir, I have a son who is the most prudent of youths. I shall leave everything to him and to *you*, my dear sir!"

"We shall be happy to do our best for you as we have done for our late respected client," returned Mr. Thorpe complacently. "Meantime, it might suit you to have a small sum lodged to your credit at some bank, for current expenses, till the formalities connected with your succession are arranged."

"I should be much obliged." Some further talk, and then Philip Cranston drove to the hospital and inquired for Mrs. Acland. She was not so well, having had a bad night, and was unable to see Mr. Acland that morning. There was no more to be done in that direction, so he went away back to his little lodging more oppressed than elated by his sudden accession of wealth and responsibility.

On entering his sitting-room he beheld a letter lying on the table—a letter addressed to him in pencil. He tore it open and found Blake's note. On the back was written, "*Prevent* their meeting, for God's sake! Get him out of the country. I am helpless—J. A."

Blake in London—Blake within reach! All Philip Cranston's easy unambitious supineness vanished at the idea. This was the one man in existence towards whom he was actively implacable. To punish the treacherous scoundrel who had deceived him from first to last—whom the woman he had once tenderly loved preferred to himself and from whose cowardly persecution she was suffering—would be the keenest pleasure. It was not too late to begin the attack. He would at once seek the tiger in his lair. No need to spare cab hire *now*. He only paused to write a hasty line to Dick, directing him to come up to town directly—his presence was much needed. Then he drove off to the address given by his intended victim.

* * * * *

When, after a restless night, Mr. Acland paid his usual morning visit to the hospital, he was dismayed to receive so bad an account of his wife, and finding that he could really do little or nothing at his office he returned in the afternoon hoping to be admitted.

Mrs. Acland, however, was in a profound sleep from which she was on no account to be awakened, so he turned away with a heavy heart, and after walking a little way in uneasy thought determined to disobey his liege lady for once—to go to Blake and so bargain with him that he might have the good news that all had been made safe when next he was able to speak with his wife alone. The very idea of action gave him courage; he would not wait for her ideas. In a matter of bargaining he was surely able to act on his own judgment.

It was a long and dreary way to the obscure alley where Blake had run to earth. A tavern of the humblest description, where a little coffee and a good deal of beer were dispensed. A huge piece of boiled beef and a basin full of flabby lettuce were set forth alluringly in a window thick with dust of ages—such was the Café Schmitt. A stout man in a grimy white apron, who was conversing affably with a group of customers, answered Mr. Acland's inquiries. "Eisenberg? ay. This way," opening a door into a dark passage; "turn to your right and go upstairs first floor front. He said he was expecting a gent." It was an evil-smelling passage; the sand with which it was strewn grated under Mr. Acland's neat, well-cleaned boots; the darkness was sufficiently visible to prevent his tumbling upstairs, and the first floor being a little lighter he made out a door, at which he knocked, and was desired to "come in."

The room he entered was dull, dirty, disordered. There was a square of carpet from which all trace of pattern had disappeared, a fire fast dying out; before the fireplace a hearth strewn with ashes and torn scraps of paper, a table covered with dark American cloth much marked by the bottoms of tumblers; some writing paper, a penny bottle of ink, a much corroded pen, the blue spectacles and

a stumpy pipe lay on it. The atmosphere was redolent of brandy and stale tobacco. Mr. Acland felt it was degradation to breathe it. Blake was sitting at the table in his shirt sleeves; his rough unnatural-looking hair, his grubby coloured shirt, his much befrogged coat hung over a chair, his dogged unkempt aspect, all seemed in keeping with his abode.

"Ha! Acland!" he said rising with much composure, "I expected you yesterday—better late than never. Glad to see you had the sense to answer my summons."

His effrontery abashed Mr. Acland. He felt as if he should never be able to purify himself from even a momentary contact with such an unsuccessful rascal.

"Sit down," continued Blake, as he noticed the hesitation of his visitor, "the chairs ain't first rate, but they'll do." Mr. Acland reluctantly took one of the three worn horse-hair covered seats which were available.

"I do not know that I *am* sensible in coming here against my wife's wish and advice, but——"

"Ay! she *is* a plucky one—never met her match. She always was since I knew her, and that's—let me see, well, on for thirty years. Lord, what a figure she had!"

"I do not care to hear your reminiscences," returned Acland with an unspeakable sense of loathing which showed in his face. "Nor do I believe your unwarrantable assertions against Mrs. Acland. Her reluctance to make terms with you is sufficient proof of their falsehood. But since your audacious intrusion into my house, circumstances have changed." He paused.

"Oh, I see! you are not the least afraid of any disclosures I may make. You only came to assist me out of pure benevolence?" said Blake with a contemptuous laugh.

"I do nothing of the kind," returned Acland sharply. "Mrs. Acland has met with a very serious accident and is still lying in the hospital where she was first taken. I dread the agitation of your threats. I want to be able to assure her that she is safe from your reappearance."

"She is not going to die?" cried Blake eagerly, with emotion of some kind.

"God forbid! She may be unable to move for some time, but I trust——" his voice broke. "Do not name her again," he exclaimed fiercely for so quiet and respectable a man. "Tell me what you want and I will do what I can; but do not suppose I will sacrifice much for you."

"Then we will cut it short. I want twenty pounds down now to clear out of this, and three hundred pounds in a week to keep out of sight."

"*That* I will certainly not give you. I will give you ten pounds to get away to Havre or anywhere else, and I will give you two hundred and forty pounds spread over three years, paid quarterly,

at any address you like, to be forfeited if you come to England or molest me."

"Pooh! a beggarly eighty pounds a year. What good would that do me?"

"Nothing can do a gambler of your sort any good."

They chattered for some time. At last it was agreed that Acland should give him the ten pounds down, a hundred when he gave an address at Havre, and another when he landed at Buenos Ayres.

Blake at once pocketed ten sovereigns with which Acland had provided himself, and they were trying to devise some form of agreement which might bind each to the other, when the door was suddenly dashed open and Cranston walked quickly into the room, and paused opposite Blake. He was looking better and younger than when he introduced himself to Mr. Acland as Brand. Blake's face grew a dirty white; his eyes dilated with terror and amazement. He started up, and drew back as if with the instinct of flight. "My God!" he stammered. "Philip Cranston, alive! How is this?"

"Yes, Philip Cranston—alive enough for the purpose of punishing you. Dog! I am in time to prevent your imposing on another victim; from me you can hope nothing. You can injure *me* no more.

To the rapid exchange of question and answer which followed, Mr. Acland listened, almost too stupefied to understand fully, except that a stunning conviction grew upon him that Brand was the real husband of his adored wife, and that she had known he was alive for some years. It was no matter what happened now—all was over.

"What will you do?" cried Blake, struggling to regain courage and self-possession. "What is the use of disturbing every one when you can do them no good? You have no money; what the devil has brought you here?"

"To take possession of the Maynard estates; my uncle is dead, and I have succeeded him."

"The game is up," said Blake, sitting down with a sullen air of defeat. "With a bank against you there's no use showing fight. And—and Judith, does she know?"

"She does; it was from her I had your address."

"And she never let me know you were alive, devil that she is!"

"I am at a loss how to address you, Mr. Acland. You suffer most from the concealment I have practised," said Cranston, turning to him. "Whatever course you and your legal advisers think best for you I shall agree to. Let me beg you to make no terms with this scoundrel. Nothing he can say can do you much harm. Leave him to his fate; it will no doubt be what he deserves."

"But, Cranston, I——"

"Silence," said Philip sternly. "There is no use in appealing

to me! If I trust myself longer in your presence I shall not be able to preserve my self-control; your rascality puts you beyond the pale of compassion. I warn you that I shall give notice to the police of your whereabouts."

"But," said Mr. Acland, who had risen and stood trembling in every limb, "my first duty is to shield my wife." He stopped and exclaimed with a groan: "But she is not my wife. What is to become of her? what is to become of my unfortunate children?" and he sank upon a chair.

"Ay," said Blake with devilish spite. "The son she persecuted and threw the blame of her own theft upon will hold up his head now; there is no stain of illegitimacy on him."

Acland, driven almost mad by this taunt, with a cry of "Liar, I do not believe you!" attempted to throw himself on the speaker, but Cranston interposed.

"It is not for men of our age to commit personal violence," he said; "let us leave him to law. Come, we will leave him; there is no more to be said."

"I do not know what to do or where to turn," said Mr. Acland helplessly. "Are you really my—my—Mrs. Acland's first husband? Will you take her away?"

"Most certainly not; she is the last creature in the world I should like to associate with, but I wish to do what is right and just by her for my son's sake. We are both too old to begin life again; let us be guided by the interests of the young creatures who depend upon us. My son and your daughter have little to thank his mother for."

He opened the door while he spoke, and Mr. Acland went slowly and mechanically out of the room. Cranston turned one backward glance, as he followed, on the defeated vagabond who stood as if turned to stone, his head drooped, his figure shrunk together; then he hurried after the miserable man whose home had been destroyed by his reappearance, and who seemed hardly able to take care of himself.

Cranston, as soon as they were in a thoroughfare, hailed a cab into which Acland entered as if moving in a dream.

"Where shall I tell him to drive to?"

"I—I don't know; I have no home. I will go to see Mr. Cross, No. 15, George Street."

He rolled away out of Philip's sight, and they never spoke again.

"It's a curious eddy of the stream that sent me to help my successor. Well, he was a good friend to my son, though, *per contra*, an indifferent father to his own daughter. If it cost her life, I'll make that woman confess the truth about that money. I wonder, did she contrive to put that bottle of chloroform under my nose? No, it is not possible; she had left the hotel. Ah! the complications of reality leave fiction far behind. I don't fancy

we shall be troubled with Blake again ; and to-morrow—to-morrow I may see my son."

So Cranston communed as he walked northwards, till overtaken by a hansom ; and suppressing a wish to pay Marjory a visit, he made the best of his way home.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE END.

It was a dismal period to Marjory. She soon began to feel there was a vague, unpleasant veil of mystery wrapping itself round her father and Mrs. Acland. She was thankful when, after the first week, the children were recalled from the seaside and an increase of household cares kept her busy. Dick's letters were brief and intermittent ; there seemed something behind them, too, which she could not quite make out, and the atmosphere felt as if surcharged with gathering troubles.

The day Mr. Acland had had the interview just described he did not return at his usual time, and when the children had gone to bed Marjory sat down in the dining-room to wait for him with a chilly feeling of coming evil. Probably her father had been detained at the hospital ; why should she feel so uneasy ? Yesterday he had seemed in better spirits, and talked more than usual. She was low and weary with the loneliness of her life. When should she see Dick again ?

"Messenger waiting for an answer, miss," said the parlour-maid, breaking in upon her musings, and presenting a note. It was from Mr. Cross :—"Your father was taken with a sudden giddiness while talking with me, and I have persuaded him to stay the night. There is nothing to alarm you in this seizure, it is the result of distress of mind. Pray send what is necessary by bearer. It is probable your father may pass a few days with me ; the change, slight as it is, will do him good, and he is nearer the hospital in my house. I will if possible see you to-morrow evening."

Marjory at once put up all she thought her father might need, and wrote a few dutiful lines to accompany the packet ; then she sat down again and gave herself up to very grave thoughts. Something was wrong, unusually wrong, when Mr. Acland absented himself from his home. She had never known him to do such a thing before, unless indeed he went out of town on business. The matter was beyond her comprehension ; she must hope the best ; so she put out the lights and went softly upstairs to nurse.

This important functionary was more friendly than of yore. She was the only one of the former servants who remained, and she was not a little offended at not being allowed to see her mistress, perfectly perceiving that had Mrs. Acland chosen to

receive a visit from her, no one—at least not Mr. Acland—would have resisted her will.

“My father must be very unwell, nurse, to stay away from home.”

“And no wonder, Miss Marjory! I suppose Mrs. Acland is taken worse! It is my belief she will never leave that dreadful place alive, and then there will be a heavy burden on your shoulders.”

“I do not think Mrs. Acland is in any danger; she was much better this morning.”

Nurse shook her head.

“That might be the light’ning before death, miss. Anyhow I am sure you’ll do your duty by them poor children, though I must say you had rather hard lines yourself.”

“No use in looking back now. I think I shall go to bed. Good-night.”

The next day passed heavily. Mr. Cross sent a brief telegram stating that Mr. Acland was better. Nurse visited the hospital, and brought a very bad account of Mrs. Acland; she had been almost raving to see her husband.

The second day of her father’s absence was cold and bleak, but Marjory forced herself to go out with the children after breakfast. She felt the need of fresh air; the constant strain of expectancy made her nervous. Nurse was thus set free to inquire for her mistress.

“There is a gentleman waiting to see you in the dining-room,” said the servant who admitted them.

“Run up to Mary, and get your things off,” said Marjory to her young charges, while she thought, “It is most likely Mr. Brand; they had better not see him.” Herbert was disposed to resist, but the parlour-maid, a young person of much decision, swept them both upstairs. Marjory opened the dining-room door, and had scarcely recognized the visitor before she was in Dick Cranston’s arms. The first few delightful moments of confused exclamations and kisses over, Dick turned her to the light.

“Why, Marge, you have grown pale and thin; you look all eyes,—sweet eyes—but I do not like to see them so big.”

“I have been so miserable, Dick! I feel as if everything was breaking away from us. Oh! what a relief to feel you near me!” and pressing close against him, Marjory allowed herself to cry quietly. Dick held her tenderly, but did not at first try to stop her tears.

“It is a trying time for us all, and I have a great deal to tell you—a great deal that is painful, also some good. First of all I went round this morning with my father to inquire for Mr. Acland; he is better, more composed, and is even going to——”

“Your father, Dick! What *are* you talking about?” said Marjory, drying her tears, and looking at him with an amused smile.

"Sit down." He drew a chair beside the sofa where she had placed herself. "There is much to explain, but I have found a father in Brand, who is really Philip Cranston, who disappeared long ago."

"Mr. Brand really your father!" cried Marjory, without stopping to think. "You will be glad, will you not? I know you always had a strong feeling about your father."

"Yes, Marge, I am heartily glad on my own account, but it's awfully bad for the rest."

"Yes, of course—I see. Why Dick, it is perfectly awful! What will become of my father? He must know it—this is what keeps him away from home. Oh, Dick, what shall we do?" She clasped his hand in both her own which trembled.

"Love each other, and stick to each other through thick and thin," replied Dick, promptly changing his chair for the sofa, and putting his arm round her. "You must listen to the long story I have to tell." Whereupon he commenced, and gave her rapidly and clearly the details which it has taken so many pages to recount.

"When I joined my father yesterday evening," he concluded, "I was quite unmanned by his joy and agitation on meeting me. He has had a hard lot, and my mother has had a still harder heart. I can never forgive her harshness, though he did her injustice I can hardly explain to you, Marge."

"Tell me one thing. Did she—did Mrs. Acland take that money she accused you of taking?"

"It is not absolutely certain, but my father believes she did. One more page of this curious history, Marge. Do you remember that pretty widow at Beaulieu, Mrs. Maynard? Well, her husband was my father's first cousin; now as he is dead and the poor little baby, my father has succeeded to the estate, as old Mr. Cranston Maynard died a few days ago; so I have found a father and a fortune together."

"A fortune, Dick," faltered Marjory. "What fortune?"

"The estate of Leighton Abbot and eight or ten thousand a year, as far as I can make out."

"But, Dick, this—this is appalling!" she grew pale and moved a little away from him.

"Why?" he asked, tightening his hold of her. "It is too much—a good deal more than one wants, but it is better than too little. It will give my father the power to smooth some difficulties. It will enable us, dearest, to marry years before we could otherwise have done. But I must not let myself sink into a mere man of wealth. You don't suppose, Marge, I would ever let anything save your own will come between us!"

"Still, Dick, it is an awful state of things. Think of the terrible position of your mother as regards my father and yours! There never was anything like it. I do not believe we ought to marry."

"On that head I have no doubt at all," said Dick with an air of conviction.

"I do not know what to say or to think," said Marjory, trying to loosen Dick's hold of her. "My poor father! I must think of him, and these poor children! What will become of them? Oh, Dick, it was very wrong of Mr. Brand to keep himself out of sight so long."

"Yes; secrets and hiding never come to good, I fancy; but there was some excuse for him. Then he never intended to show up again. You must not be hard on my father, Marge."

"Oh, no, Dick; I like him too much. But I am too bewildered to judge anything fairly, and I am frightened—unhappy—not knowing what to do."

"Will you trust me, Marge? Let things arrange themselves, as they will do; and then, if all this unfortunate complication does not turn you away from me—— Why do you look so sad and tremble so, Marge?" interrupting himself.

"Because I cannot help feeling the great change in your circumstances and all this confusion will put a barrier between us. Mr.—— I mean your father, will want you to marry some great lady, as I suppose you might."

Dick laughed pleasantly.

"My father thinks nearly as much of you as I do, Marge, and we will both do our best to make all things square. Listen, my darling; we have but an hour to talk to each other just now, for I have to meet my father at Lincoln's Inn. Tell me about yourself and let us leave these troubles for the present; we cannot change them by worrying ourselves. Tell me again that you love me and will let nothing and no one come between us."

* * * * *

While these two young hearts comforted each other with assurances of true and steadfast love an interview of a very different description was passing between Cranston and his sorely-stricken wife. He had ascertained that Acland had not been to see her since they had met, and knowing the state of suspense in which she must be, he applied, through Mr. Cross, for a line of introduction to the doctor. This Acland sent at once. A short and partial explanation satisfied the doctor, and Cranston was left alone with the sufferer.

He stood by her for a moment in silence, while her eyes were fixed with dread and eagerness on his. Her fine fair hair was carefully arranged, but her cheeks were hollow, her lips bloodless; only the eyes looked alive, and they glowed with an intensity that deepened their colour and made the rest of her face more ghastly; her thin white hands lay helplessly on the coverlet. The picture of what she was five-and-twenty years ago, when he had passionately loved the woman he believed her to be, came back

vividly to his memory, and all the misery of his awakening from the dream in which for a while he had been happy. Even hate for her had left him. He could only feel compassion not untinged by contempt for the wreck before him.

The silence was first broken by her exclaiming in a hoarse, forceful whisper:

"Blake?"

"He has fled," returned Cranston. "He will never trouble you again."

"And—my husband?"

"He knows all, and is struck down with grief and despair."

"What about old Maynard?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" she uttered the word with a cry of agony. "Dead!" she repeated striking her hands together. "Then you are a wealthy man of large estate, of importance, and I am a maimed, ruined beggar! I have lived in vain. Why do you let me live to be a burden and a curse?"

"Hush, Judith! you may find a use in life yet."

"Ah! had I been able to fulfil my wishes you should have died; then Dick would have had all, and he would not have deserted his mother."

"Had I died Dick would not have inherited a sou. The property would have gone to the eldest Cranston living at the death of my uncle; that would have been my cousin Hugh."

To this Mrs. Acland did not reply; she tossed her head from side to side and muttered almost incoherently:

"Dick is the conqueror! Had I succeeded all would have been lost! Cruel! unfair!—not worse than others, only too heavily weighted." Then she closed her eyes, looking like death. Philip Cranston thought she was dead, and was trying to overcome a strange reluctance to touch her hands when they closed with a sudden convulsive movement and she opened her eyes. Fixing them gloomily on his, she asked in a sharp, weak, discordant voice:

"What is to become of me? am I to go to the workhouse?"

"My son's mother shall want no necessary or comfort," said Cranston gently; then, as she made no answer but continued to stare at him, he continued:

"If you and Acland wish for a divorce and re-marriage I will do all I can to help you, on one condition."

"Divorce—re-marriage," she repeated with a horrid laugh, "for a helpless log like me! It is not worth the trouble. I will die Mrs. Cranston Maynard! But what is your condition?"

"Confess that you took that money—do justice to your son."

"No! you can give me nothing in exchange."

"I can leave you a burden on the man whose home you have destroyed."

"Is that my fault? It is yours! Ah! I was a good wife to

him. I am blameless as regards him, and yet *he* has deserted me!"

"No; the unhappy man is struck down powerless by the greatness of his misfortunes."

"He is a coward," she returned coldly. "He would sacrifice me to his respectability."

"You have no right to say so."

"If I loved any one I would suffer torture for him!" she cried.

"Did you *ever* love any one?" asked Cranston.

"Yes," fiercely, "a base hound who threw me off to battle with degradation as best I could."

There was a pause.

"You had better see Acland and agree upon some plan of action, but remember mine is contingent on your confession," said Cranston.

She thought in silence, her fingers clasping and unclasping themselves.

"It is possible I may recover, though not likely," she exclaimed. "If I do will you give me the allowance I might have had, had we separated by mutual consent?—I living on the continent; you spreading no evil reports about me?"

"I will," replied Philip.

"I believe you; you were always foolishly scrupulous about your word. Write down the confession and I will sign it."

"No, you must speak it face to face, and Acland must write to Dick to say his suspicions have been cleared away."

"Then you will see that I am provided for, and that I may have Herbert in his holiday time."

"I promise you faithfully."

"It is a cruel defeat. It is the torture of the damned to lie here helpless in the hands of my enemies."

"No enemies save of your own making," were the words that rose to his lips, but he could not taunt a creature so prostrate, so bankrupt in all that makes life worth living.

"Would you like your step-daughter to call?"

"No, no, no—a thousand times no! I want neither her nor Dick! I want no canting superior creatures to pity me in my low estate. I do not want to see you either unless it is necessary. After all, you do not oppress me as the others do. Remember, it is what religious idiots call the judgment of heaven, not the superior strength or cleverness of others, that has beaten me down. Go, I do not want you."

* * * * *

The experienced reader can want but little more detail. He, or more probably *she*, will anticipate that the comfortable, well-appointed house in Falkland Terrace has been broken up, and the doubly widowed Acland and his children removed to a suburban villa a few miles out of town. where their name was as little known

as if they had come from the other side of the Atlantic. The once admirable Mrs. Acland was supposed to have gone to some health resort, and the family vanished from the ken of society in the North-West district. That Marjory presided over the new un-home-like home until the children went to school; that Uncle and Aunt Carteret, finding it necessary to visit London the following year, celebrated the very modest wedding of their "favourite" niece in the house they had hired; that Lord Beaulieu was Dick's best man; that his young widowed sister put on grey and graced the occasion; that Philip Cranston was the kindest, the most cheery, of inmates, and if ever a father and father-in-law was spoiled he was the man—even the fair widow, Mrs. Maynard, clung to him, remembering how her precious baby used to stretch out his little hands and laugh with delight whenever the wandering artist approached him—that all things fell into natural and satisfactory order.

Away in a pretty south coast town, celebrated for the balmy softness of its sea breeze, vegetates a helpless invalid whose attendants have from time to time to be changed, so wearing is her bitter, vicious irritability. She has all the comforts and convenience that can be found. She has books and work—for her lower limbs only are paralyzed—but nothing soothes or softens her. Twice a year a handsome boy spends part of his holidays with her and is loaded with presents and luxuries, but nothing makes him tender or patient with his suffering mother.

Every two or three months a lady and gentleman come to stay at the chief hotel there, and the lady goes daily to see the querulous invalid. The gentleman never crosses the threshold; he waits for his companion on the beach or on the esplanade. When he sees her coming his face brightens and they stroll to and fro talking gently and gravely.

Mr. Acland has become the most silent of men. He has grown miserly too, so bent is he on leaving a fortune to his children—a fortune that may in some measure obliterate the bar sinister on their scutcheon. He seems to have no life left save in business and a faint relish for the *Times*. He is coldly deferential to his married daughter, and still endeavours tenaciously to cover all expenses by the moderate income derived from his "Life Interest."

THE END.

IN SOME OTHER WORLD.

By CURTIS YORKE,

AUTHOR OF "DUDLEY," "THAT LITTLE GIRL," ETC.

"Mind may act upon mind, though bodies be far divided,
For the life is in the blood, but souls communicate unseen."

Martin Tupper.

THEY met for the first time—on earth—in a crowded ball-room ; and—but stay, I anticipate slightly.

She, Gladys, was seated in the shady gloom of a balcony overlooking the street, but made fragrant and retired by banks of perfume-shedding flowers. She was tired, and had asked her partner to leave her to rest awhile. As she lay back in the cushioned seat—the balmy air of the summer night fanning her forehead, the dreamy rhythm of the music mingling with the ceaseless roar of London in her ears—a sense of drowsiness took possession of her, from which she was gradually aroused by the curious conviction, familiar to most of us, that a gaze as yet unseen was bent upon her. She moved restlessly, for she had thought herself alone ; then, raising her head, she became aware that at the extreme end of the balcony, which ran along six wide windows, a tall, well-made man was leaning, his head bent slightly forward, his eyes fixed on hers. His face was not in the shadow, but Gladys saw nothing but the eyes. Steady, piercing, concentrated, they compelled her gaze ; and as she gazed she felt an indefinable sense of unreality, of *bodilessness* come over her. Her soul seemed floating into space. Then she became conscious that a hand held hers, and that a voice spoke to her. Still she seemed floating on—on into nothingness, and looking upwards, she again seemed to meet the steady gaze of those strange eyes.

"We have met before," said the voice.

"Where ?" she heard herself say.

"In some other world," was the answer.

Then she struggled back to consciousness. She was still on the balcony, and the last few bars of the waltz still quivered on the air. She had not moved, she knew, for a spray of stephanotis, which had lain on her knee when she passed into her brief trance, lay there still. The stranger stood where she had first seen him, but his eyes were bent upon the ground. His face, his figure, his

very attitude, seemed illusively familiar to her. *Where* had she seen him before?

Later in the evening, as she was returning from the supper-room on the arm of her *fiancé*, Bernard Campbell, her hostess approached her with a tall, distinguished-looking man in her wake.

"Miss Raynor," she said with a smile, "allow me to introduce Mr. Harcourt Kennard."

Gladys looked up to meet the same pair of penetrating dark grey eyes which had so startled her on the balcony. *Compelling* eyes they were, with the look of quiet power about them which characterized the whole face. Not a handsome face, but strong (if severe), with lips that could soften into wonderful sweetness, as they were doing now. His hair and moustache were brown, heavily tinged with grey. In age he looked considerably over thirty.

What he saw was a slender, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of perhaps twenty, her face not so much beautiful as *spirituelle*, and indicative of a highly-strung nervous temperament and markedly keen susceptibilities. As their eyes met she started, then turned a shade paler.

"You will waltz with me?" he said in a very low voice.

It was not the request of a stranger, it was rather the acceptance of a foregone conclusion by a tried and privileged friend. She acquiesced, after a moment's hardly perceptible hesitation, and they were soon gliding among the swaying dancers. Neither spoke until the dance was ended, and it seemed to both that it was an unusually short one.

"Have we met before?" she asked, looking up at him with troubled, puzzled eyes, as he led her to a secluded part of the sultry fragrant conservatory.

"Have we?" he queried gravely.

"Never to my knowledge," she said in slow, doubtful tones; "and yet your face seems strangely familiar to me."

"It may be that we *have* met before," he returned in a very low voice. "If not in this world—in another."

He had seated himself on a low chair near to her, and was slowly furling and unfurling her fan, his eyes on the ground. At his words she started violently, then recovering herself, she said with a half smile:

"In a previous existence, perhaps."

"It may be so," he answered. And as he spoke, she felt his eyes concentrate themselves on hers, felt the same dreamy unconsciousness overcoming her as before.

"Don't!" she said quickly. "Don't! Why do you look at me so?"

"I cannot tell you," he answered, in a strange far-away voice. "You spoke of a previous existence. I feel I am risking your just

displeasure at my presumption when I say that it seems to me as though—when or where I know not, in some other planet, perhaps—*you had once belonged to me.*”

Her face crimsoned. She rose, with an indescribably haughty gesture of her pretty head.

“You presume indeed, Mr. Kennard,” she said quietly. “Will you kindly take me back to the ball-room?”

He had risen also, and they stood facing one another.

“Forgive me,” he said, turning rather pale.

She did not answer, for she was angry. And yet it was a troubled, startled, unwilling anger, too.

“Do you believe in the doctrine of re-incarnation,” he asked abruptly, after a short pause, during which Miss Raynor’s anger became somewhat modified.

“You mean?” she said without looking at him.

“I mean,” he answered steadily, “do you believe that certain souls, spirits—what you will—inhabit successive bodies, pass into other planets, meet and recognize each other in successive existences, and belong to each other for all time?”

No one was near; a tiny fountain plashed in the near distance; the music sounded far away, like music heard in a dream. Gladys shivered slightly, then she raised her eyes to her companion’s.

A faint, hardly perceptible agitation swept over his features.

“Do you remember?” he said in low, intense tones, bending slightly towards her.

She put both hands to her head with a low startled cry.

“Ah, don’t!” she faltered in a bewildered kind of way. “I do remember, vaguely, indefinitely—but—I do not know what it is that I remember.”

A curious smile flitted across his lips; but he only said, and his voice grew deep and shaken:

“In this world, at least, we may be friends, may we not?”

“Friends,” she repeated dreamily. “Friends! Yes.” As she spoke she held out her hand to him. His fingers closed over hers for a brief second, then he said quietly:

“Thank you. We may both need a friend.”

At this moment Miss Raynor’s partner for the next dance appeared in search of her, and with a grave bow Kennard turned away.

The season went on, and they met frequently. Gladys was to be married in September. Bernard Campbell, her *fiancé*, was a man in a good position, and of good family. He was rather a cold, stern wooer, perhaps, but he loved his bride-to-be very sincerely, her father approved of him very highly, and she had known him all her life. She had never asked herself whether she loved him or not—until lately. He was good to look at, generous and intellectual, besides being wealthy and influential, and Gladys had hitherto accepted her fate willingly enough. But of late a

curious unrest had possessed her, and it dated from the night of her compact of friendship with Harcourt Kennard. She wondered that she had never noticed before how cold, how unsympathetic Bernard was. But he was so good, so honourable, so much all he ought to be in every way. She *ought* to love him very much, she thought remorsefully. But—*did* she? Now, a man has not touched a woman's heart very nearly when she has to sum up to herself reasons *why* she ought to love him, and Bernard, who was not so cold as he looked, used to watch her anxiously at this time. He was far from being a demonstrative lover, but he was human, and he could not but feel a pang of disappointment at the evident distaste with which she shrank now from his lightest caress, even from the kiss of greeting and farewell which was surely his as her lover and future husband. Had she ever loved him? he wondered, or had her sleeping heart only been content and indifferent, because unawakened?

The season had come to an end. Fashionable London was comparatively empty and deserted. Piccadilly and Regent Street were easily navigable without the aid of eyes in the back of one's head, and the office of the mounted policemen in the Row was decidedly a sinecure. The wearied slaves of pleasure and conventionality had dispersed to seaside, or country, or foreign towns, as their tastes inclined. Among those who did none of these things was Harcourt Kennard. He was a rising barrister, and devoted himself to his profession with a resolute determined ardour which could hardly fail to bring him success. That it was the long vacation made no difference to him; he had neither the time nor the money, he said, to waste in holiday-making. His chums at the Bar shrugged their shoulders; but Kennard had a drain upon his income which none of his friends suspected. As a matter of fact, no one knew much about him, for he was unusually reticent upon subjects relating to himself. He did not look like a happy man, women said. Nor was he.

This summer, however, contrary to his usual custom, he accepted an invitation from an old college friend to go down into Somersetshire for a few days. Among the other guests were Gladys Raynor and Bernard Campbell. A well-known writer on mesmerism joined the party on the day following Kennard's arrival. He appeared much interested in the latter, and soon found him almost as ardent a disciple of mesmerism and its attendant phenomena as he was himself.

"Your face betokens singular power of will, Mr. Kennard," he said to him on the second evening, as they stood together in a deep window recess. "Have you ever exercised the mesmeric influence you so undoubtedly possess?"

"Often," answered the other, with a sudden, quick contraction of his brows.

"Have you ever failed?"

"Never," was the brief reply.

"Ah! I thought not. I should like you to try your power on some of the guests here to-night."

"No, not to-night," said Kennard hurriedly. "I don't feel up to it."

"Don't you? You ought to. Give me your hand."

The other complied, with a short laugh.

Mr. Virrel held it for a few moments, then slowly let it go.

"You will oblige me, will you not?" he said then.

"Very well," replied Kennard, speaking half to himself. "Yes, if you wish it."

Mr. Virrel's suggestion met with general approval. The hostess, a pretty, excitable young woman, was the first subject, much against her husband's wishes. But she was a self-willed little dame, and took her own way. Kennard had desired that the room might be perfectly silent. Mrs. Carden laughed a little at first, then by slow degrees her beautiful eyes became fastened upon Kennard's—wavered, closed. She was completely in his power, and obeyed him implicitly in all he told her to do or say, until her husband angrily interfered, and Kennard released her. Several other guests volunteered, and in spite of evident disbelief, yielded with more or less difficulty to the spell cast over them by Kennard. Campbell, who was a confirmed sceptic, scornfully refused to take part in any such folly, as he called it, and stood apart with an expression of haughty boredom on his handsome face, until Mr. Virrel approached Gladys.

"Miss Raynor," said the latter gentleman, "will you test Mr. Kennard's power?"

But before she could answer, Kennard said hurriedly, "Miss Raynor will excuse me. I have exhausted my powers."

Gladys flashed a quick grateful glance at him. He was leaning against the mantelshelf, his face deadly pale, his eyes bent on the ground. In a few minutes he left the room, and was seen no more that night. As the door closed after him, Gladys, half-rising, met her lover's eyes, full of an amazed, severe displeasure. She flushed crimson, and sank back into her chair. But he had noted the burning blush, and the expression in her eyes as they rested on Kennard. He said nothing, but from that night a wild bitter jealousy raged in his heart, and robbed him of peace and rest.

During the evening Mr. Virrel said to Gladys:

"I feel certain you are *clairvoyante*, Miss Raynor. Do let me try if I am right."

He was so confident and so importunate that she yielded. But greatly to his surprise and discomfiture, she did not come under his influence at all.

On the following morning Kennard returned to town.

Time went on. Half September had gone, and it was within a fortnight of Gladys Raynor's wedding day. The weather had been

for some days sultry and oppressive, and to-night a thunderstorm seemed imminent. Harcourt Kennard sat in his chambers in the Temple. The windows were wide open to the night, though the air without was as suffocatingly breathless as within. His usually busy pen was still, his books were pushed aside, and before him lay an open letter. It was from Gladys Raynor, and contained only a few words, thanking her "friend" for the handsome bracelet he had sent her as a wedding gift. Her *friend*, he thought bitterly, only her friend. Nothing more. He had not seen her since they parted in Somersetshire. He had not dared. For he knew that he loved her, madly, passionately—and in a few short days she would be Bernard Campbell's wife. He had fought against his passion manfully, but it held him still. A maddening, overwhelming desire was upon him to-night to hear her voice once more, to look into her eyes, to touch her hand. The mad, wild longing seemed to take possession of him, and shook his very soul.

"Ah, my darling, my little Gladys," he groaned half aloud, "come to me! I cannot live without you. *Gladys—come to me!*" He hardly knew what he said; his whole being vibrated with his fierce delirium of mingled passion and despair. He let his head fall forward on his arms, and sat quite still for a long time. And as he sat there in such bitter suffering as a man rarely knows but once in a lifetime, there came to him again the strange haunting conviction that once—*when*, he could not know, somewhere—*where*, he dared not think, before time was, perhaps, or in some unknown world—they had been all in all to each other; and his soul cried out now that she should not be his, but another's.

The hour of midnight boomed out on the overcharged air, and still he had not moved. The thunderstorm had burst with terrific fury; the fierce lightning played upon the walls, and paled the flickering lamp upon the table into insignificance; the long pent-up rain swept in at the open windows. But Kennard heeded none of those things. For a deadlier, fiercer storm was raging in his own heart.

Suddenly, in a pause between the thunder-claps, he heard a light footstep ascending the stairs, a hand on the lock of the door. He raised his head, and wearily swept the hair off his forehead. The door slowly opened and shut, and a slender girlish figure, enveloped in a long fur cloak, advanced into the room, her face deathly pale, even through the thick veil she wore, her clothes drenched and clinging about her. Kennard rose to his feet; but a sudden overpowering giddiness obliged him to lean against the table for support. Was he dreaming, or was it Gladys Raynor whom he saw? She came slowly but unwaveringly towards him, her hands half-extended, her eyes fixed on his.

"I have come," she said in a low monotone, as of one who talked in her sleep. "You called me. I am here. What do you want with me?"

For a few moments Kennard literally could not speak. He gazed at her—stupefied. Then, with a mighty effort, he said hoarsely, “Gladys! What have I done—what have I done? Child, it is *madness* for you to be here.”

He took her hand as he spoke and placed her gently in a chair, for she was trembling violently. She submitted passively while he unfastened her cloak and removed her hat, but she pushed away the wine he brought her.

“Take it,” he said entreatingly; “you are faint and exhausted. It will do you good.”

She obeyed him silently.

“Did you meet any one?” he said then in low, agitated tones. “How did you get in?”

“I do not know how I got in,” she murmured. “I met no one. I think not.”

“Thank Heaven!” he ejaculated in a disturbed kind of way.

She looked wildly around her, sprang to her feet, and burst into hysterical sobs.

“Oh, *what* must you think of me?” she cried. “What have I done? Something *made* me come. Something *compelled* me. Ah, believe me!”

“Tell me,” he said in a carefully suppressed voice. “Tell me how it was, and try to calm yourself. Then you must let me take you home.” As he spoke he put her gently back into her chair again, and seated himself at some distance from her.

“I was sitting alone,” she faltered with trembling lips. “Bernard had just gone. I had begged him to release me from our engagement. I had told him I would rather *die* than marry him; but he refused—he said it was too late; and I was *very* miserable. Then—quite suddenly—I heard your voice call me. You said—ah! I cannot tell you what you said—but I felt I *must* come. I could not help it.”

A fierce, ungovernable joy filled Kennard’s heart; but he only said, controlling his voice with an effort:

“And did you walk all the way in that storm, poor little child?”

“Yes,” shuddering, “all the way. I did not know which way to go, but an invisible hand seemed to lead me. I only felt that you called me, that you wanted me, and that I must come.”

Kennard had grown very white.

“Gladys,” he said huskily and without looking at her, “you say I called you. Tell me—what I said.”

“No, no, I cannot,” she replied, a burning blush covering her hitherto pale cheeks.

He turned his eyes on hers.

“Tell me,” he said, speaking almost in a whisper.

She wavered, then said, almost inaudibly:

"The voice—I heard—it seemed to say—'*Gladys—come to me! I—cannot live—without you!*'"

Kennard's breath came thick and short; his lips, under his heavy moustache, were white and dry. For a minute he did not speak. Then he said, indistinctly and brokenly:

"Gladys, forgive me. I *did* say those words—I *did* call you in my wretchedness—in my intolerable misery. My soul called to yours—and oh! my darling," hoarsely, "*yours answered me!*"

Again there was a short silence, broken only by the roar of the rushing rain outside.

"Gladys," he went on, in a voice shaken by passion, the words seeming wrung from him against his will, "I believe in the sight of Heaven we belong to each other!"

She looked up into his haggard face imploringly.

"Ah, don't—don't!" she gasped. "You forget—you forget!"

He covered his face with his hands.

"Ah, yes," he muttered, "I forget! You do not know—how much!"

Then, almost sternly:

"Come—let me take you home."

"Pardon my intrusion at such an interesting crisis," said a cold clear voice from the doorway; and the next moment Bernard Campbell strode into the room, his eyes dark with fury, his face grey and drawn as though with physical pain. "I have no longer the slightest wish, Miss Raynor, to control your actions in any way," he went on in the same curiously quiet voice. "You asked me to-night to release you from your engagement. You have your wish—you are free!"

He turned as if to go. He had not taken the smallest notice of Kennard, who stood motionless, speechless, his face stern and set, as though carved in stone. Gladys sprang to her feet.

"Bernard!" she gasped, "what—*what* do you mean?"

"I mean this," he said, with an inflection of bitter scorn in his clear tones, "that a woman who, as my promised wife, can so far forget herself as to visit another man's rooms—alone—at midnight—is no wife for me! That——"

With a furious exclamation Kennard sprang towards him, then stopped short, and bit his lip violently. For was not this man the affianced husband of the woman he so dearly loved?

"You must be mad, Campbell!" he exclaimed in thick, husky tones. "For Heaven's sake, think what you are saying. This—this meeting is a pure accident, for which I alone am to blame. If you will let me explain, you will see that—that——" He stopped. Campbell had walked to the mantelpiece, and now stood leaning against it, a bitter smile curving his white lips. A stranger would have thought him almost calm, so impassive was the cold, handsome face. Not even Gladys guessed the white heat of passion which smouldered under this icy self-possession.

“I await your explanation, Mr. Kennard,” he said in a voice almost deadly in its unnatural quietness.

Kennard paused, mentally cursing his own mad folly, which had brought such cruel insult and suspicion on the name of the woman who, even in his thoughts, was so sacred to him. *How* could he explain? How could he expect to be believed? Would *he* believe such a tale, were he in Campbell’s place? Most assuredly *not*!

“Listen,” he said almost fiercely. “I—I love Miss Raynor. You, who know her so well, will forgive me so much. To-night, I——” He paused. Again the evil sneer rested on Campbell’s lips.

“I see,” he said in icy tones, turning his eyes again upon Gladys, who stood horror-stricken, with dark dilating eyes and quick-drawn breath, “I see. I quite understand. You love Miss Raynor. And she loves you. And she has come here to-night to tell you so. Well—I will not interrupt such tender confidences. I——”

“Good God!” broke in Kennard violently. “What do you mean? Be silent, and hear me, or I swear I will kill you!”

“Pardon me,” returned the other with a pale smile, “I have heard enough, and more than enough. When Miss Raynor asked me to-night to release her from her engagement to me, I did not realize, unhappily, what good reason she had for her request. I realize it now, and beg to resign my rights in your favour. I consider myself fortunate in that I was prompted to follow her to-night. Permit me to leave you together.” With a slight contemptuous bow which included both, he went towards the door. But Kennard could control himself no longer. With a muttered curse, he flung himself at Campbell’s throat, and bore him furiously backwards. But the next instant, Gladys, with a bitter, agonized cry, threw herself between them.

“Harcourt!” she shrieked, “for *my* sake!”

Kennard’s arms fell to his sides; his hands were clenched, his breathing was laboured and uneven. For a moment the two men glared at each other, then with a look at Gladys that she never forgot—so intense, so full of bitter scorn and contempt was it—Campbell turned slowly and went out. As the door closed, Kennard leaned back against the wall, like one struck by a heavy blow.

“My darling—my darling!” he muttered deliriously, scarce knowing what he said. “To what insults have I subjected you! Can you ever forgive me?”

“I must go home,” she said, pushing back her hair confusedly, and speaking almost in a whisper. “You will take me home? Now—*now*! At once!”

“Yes—yes—I will take you home,” he answered agitatedly. “But first—tell me—is it *true* that you asked him to release you? Do you not love him, then?” The last words were almost in-

audible. He had come quite close to her, and stood with folded arms, looking down into her eyes. But he did not attempt to touch her, not even to take her hand.

"*Love him!*" she cried wildly. "No—no! I have known for a long time that I never loved him. I thank Heaven that I am free. But—but his bitter insulting words make me feel—make me feel——" Her voice quivered into a sob.

Kennard turned from her with a low, inarticulate cry, and throwing himself into a chair, he covered his face with his hands. For one moment Gladys hesitated; then she went swiftly towards him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Harcourt!" she said tremulously, and his pulses thrilled at the sound of his name from her lips, "do not be so grieved. I know *you* are not to blame, dear. It was all my own folly. Harcourt, why do you look at me so? What is it that you fear? You have said you love me. Is it that you think I do not love you? Ah—for a long, long time——"

He started to his feet.

"Stay!" he said hoarsely. "Hush, my darling—do not say it! It is true that I love you. But I dare not offer you my love—dare not hope for the mad joy of yours in return. For—ah! God help me!—I am *married!*"

For quite a minute there was silence.

"*Married!*" she echoed then, half-stupidly. "*Married!* Ah no—not *that!*" Her eyes met his with an agonized terrified appeal that pierced his heart. He turned away with a gesture of despair.

"What must you think of me?" she murmured with white lips. "You are married—and yet you dare to speak to me of love! Ah, what must you think of me? How low I must have fallen in your sight!" Large tears rolled over her cheeks.

"Don't!" he said indistinctly. "Child, don't cry."

She had begun mechanically to fasten her cloak, and he helped her with nervous, trembling fingers.

"Gladys," he said imploringly, "say—that you forgive me!"

"Hush!" she answered in dull, passionless tones. "Hush! Don't speak to me—yet!"

Together—silently—they descended the stairs, and went out into the court below. The rain still fell heavily, and plashed monotonously in the fountain. At intervals a peal of thunder rolled in the distance. Neither spoke until they reached the street, then Kennard said almost harshly:

"We had better call a hansom. I will go with you to your own door. Nay," as she made a gesture of dissent, "allow me so much grace. I must justify myself in your eyes. Then I will trouble you no more."

And as they drove through the rain-washed streets, he told her, in a few broken sentences, the story of his marriage. It was the old pitiful story of a boy's mad infatuation for a woman grievously

beneath him in every way—of a hasty private marriage, as hastily repented of.

"My infatuation did not last long," he went on bitterly. "I had scarcely been married for two months when I discovered that the woman to whom I had given my name was coarse-minded, illiterate, intemperate, and—more degrading than all—unfaithful. It was my money, my position she loved—not me. Then came terrible scenes. I shudder when I think of her face as I came to know it then, of her brutal taunts, her—— But pah! Why do I pollute your innocent ears with such details. We parted—I agreeing to pay her a certain sum yearly, as the price of my comparative freedom. She was quite content. That was ten years ago. I have never seen her since." He stopped, for he was terribly agitated, and could hardly command his voice.

"All those years," he went on after a minute, "her allowance has been drawn with unfailing regularity. But this summer, my solicitor tells me, no application has been made. The money has hitherto been paid at a small village in Wales, but from inquiries which I have caused to be made, I learn that she is no longer there. At times, of late, I have allowed myself to indulge in the hope that she no longer lives. But"—between his set teeth—"the she-devil is not likely to die. If I could *know* that I were free. But, oh, my God! I may *never* know! I have spoiled your life," he went on in shaking tones, "and you have spoken no word of reproach. I have stood by and heard you insulted. I have insulted you myself by the mere mention of my love for you. Child, you do not know how I have battled against it—tried to conquer it! And to-night I have undone it all," he exclaimed with sudden passion. "I must have been mad—*mad!*"

Gladys had not spoken. He knew that she was weeping. "Say one kind word to me," he said brokenly. "Say that you forgive me."

Just then the cab stopped.

"Ah, yes," she breathed, leaning slightly towards him. "I forgive you. But—you have broken my heart!"

Then they parted. And Kennard paced the streets in the pitiless soaking rain until the busy life of London had begun with the morning.

* * * *

Mr. George Virrel occupied a pleasant set of rooms a little way from Piccadilly. He had just finished dinner one evening, some few days after the events narrated above, when a visitor was announced—Mr. Kennard.

"My dear fellow," said Virrel genially, "I am indeed glad to see you. Sit down. Have a cigar, and help yourself to claret."

The two men had met frequently of late, and a warm friendship had sprung up between them.

"Thanks, no; I won't take anything," replied Kennard, striking a match rather absently, without, however, lighting the cigar he held.

"You are in trouble, I fear," observed Virrel, regarding him keenly. "You look ill and haggard."

"I am not ill," returned the other shortly. "At least nothing to speak of. But—I am in great trouble. I have come to you for advice and help."

"I shall be glad to give you both, if I can," said his companion quietly. "But it is a difficult problem."

Kennard started, and threw away his unlighted cigar.

"What do you mean?" he said. "Do you know——?"

"I know almost all you would tell me," returned Virrel, carefully dissecting a walnut as he spoke. "At least I have heard a good deal, and I can guess the rest."

"What have you heard?" said the other, rising and taking a few rapid turns up and down the room.

"I have heard that Miss Raynor's engagement is broken off, though it wants little more than a week of the day fixed for her marriage. That her father, being furious, has vowed to keep her boxed up in the country until she comes to her senses, and that they leave town on Friday. That Campbell has suddenly gone abroad, without leaving any address, etc., etc. Combining all these rumours with certain confidences of yours, I have come to the conclusion that you are in an uncommonly tight place."

"For Heaven's sake don't torture me with your infernal chaff," exclaimed Kennard, throwing himself with considerable violence into a chair. "Can you help me—advise me?"

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow," said Virrel with cool deliberation, "and we will discuss the matter. I have a plan to propose."

* * * *

It was past midnight when the two men separated.

"On Friday, then, at noon," were Virrel's last words, as he grasped Kennard's hand in parting. "I will arrange it all."

It was noon on the following Friday. In Virrel's luxurious sitting-room the glare of the sun was shut out by thick velvet curtains. A silver lamp of curious workmanship burned on the table, shedding a dim uncertain light which scarcely defined the features of three people who stood near it—Virrel, Kennard, and Gladys Raynor. The latter was very pale, and seemed much agitated. As for Kennard, he looked exceedingly ill, and, indeed, he was ill. Virrel looked serious and preoccupied, as usual.

"It is too much for you," said Kennard, addressing Gladys in low, unsteady tones. "You are trembling and nervous. We will put it off until another time, until——"

"No, no," she interrupted him feverishly. "There will be no

other time. I do not know when we may meet again. Oh, quick—quick! We leave at two, and my father will be waiting for me.”

“Are you ready?” said Virrel suddenly, from the other end of the room.

Gladys seated herself in a low chair, and Kennard bent over her.

“Darling, you understand?” he said. “Abandon your whole will to mine. You know how—how much is at stake.”

“Yes,” steadily, “I know—I understand.”

He paused, then said with an effort:

“Gladys—look at me!”

She obeyed. But Kennard was so agitated and unnerved that his usually strong will failed him. After some time he gave up the attempt in despair.

“I cannot,” he said harshly. “I am idiotically nervous and unstrung.”

With an impatient exclamation Virrel put him aside, and took the girl’s hands in his. But after a minute or two he dropped them, saying abruptly:

“I have no power over her. I tried once before. As I told you, hers is one of those rare temperaments which only respond to the influence of one operator. Give me your hand, Kennard, and for Heaven’s sake keep cool. Wait—drink this,” pouring out a glass of clear and sparkling liquid from an antique flagon on a side table.

Five minutes elapsed. Then Kennard withdrew his hand from Virrel’s, saying quietly:

“I am all right now. I am ready.”

Gladys raised her beautiful eyes to his. The old dreamy spell came over her. In a few moments she was in a deep trance.

“Gladys,” he said in a low intense voice, “take hold of this,” holding out to her a piece of crumpled note paper, covered with sprawling, uneducated handwriting, “and follow the life of—of Marion Kennard.”

Her fingers closed over it mechanically. There was a brief silence; then a slight shiver passed over her.

“Yes, Harcourt,” she murmured. “I know what you would have me do. I will.”

She answered clearly all the questions Kennard put to her, Virrel meanwhile noting down her answers on a sheet of paper. But sometimes she paused for almost a minute before answering. Once she remained silent so long that Kennard felt his self-control rapidly forsaking him. Then she said in a hushed voice:

“I see her now—again. She is lying straight, and white, and still. She is in her coffin.” With the last words she shuddered and became silent.

“Gladys,” said Harcourt in a voice which it required all his self-command to keep steady, “look again and tell me what you see.”

"I see," she answered dreamily, "a crowd of people in the room. Their faces are hard and repellent; and their speech—I can only with difficulty understand it, and yet it is not a foreign tongue. I see bare, roughly-made furniture. There are no flowers in the window, no pictures on the walls. On the mantelpiece I see a curiously-constructed clock. It is an almanac as well as a clock, and——"

Kennard reeled slightly, and uttered a low, rapid exclamation.

"What is the date?" he said agitatedly.

"It points to the 2nd of October," she answered almost immediately, "and the year is 188——"

"Ah, so! A year ago," involuntarily exclaimed Virrel, who now spoke for the first time.

"Look from the window and tell me what you see," said Kennard again.

"I see a sandy beach," she answered slowly, "and tossing waves, and a great dome-like rock far out on the water. I see a common covered with nets, and a harbour. I see——"

Here Kennard, with an inarticulate cry, suddenly dropped her hands. She awoke and started up, looking round her wildly. But the double strain had been too much for Kennard, and he had only time to get to a chair, when, for the first time in his life, he fainted.

It was some time before he came to himself again, and when he did, Gladys bent over him eagerly and excitedly.

"Harcourt," she whispered, "have I helped you? Have I done as you wished?"

"Yes," he answered faintly. "I have the clue. It is not much; but it is enough."

"Ah—I must go," she said suddenly, glancing at the timepiece.

"One moment," said Kennard, struggling to his feet. "What a weak fool you must think me—but I am all right now. I shall see you to-night, Virrel," he continued hurriedly.

"My dear fellow," said the other in a determined aside, "I will put Miss Raynor into a hansom, and you will remain quietly here until I return. There," as Kennard staggered slightly; "you're not fit to walk at present. I knew it. Sit down, and I will talk to you when I come back."

"No—no, you must not come," exclaimed Gladys in quick nervous tones. "You are ill. Oh—how white you are!" She held out her hands to him as she spoke; and Virrel considerably walked into the inner room.

"Good-bye, then," Kennard said hoarsely. "Forgive my stupid weakness, but I have been ill and out of sorts for some days. Gladys—we may never meet again. For your sake I wish we had never met. But you have given me new hope; some indefinable intuition tells me that—that I am free. I shall leave no stone unturned—no clue unfollowed. God bless you, my darling. I

shall write to you if—if I am successful. If not—it is good-bye indeed—until—hereafter!”

He did not kiss her, not even the little hands that lay trembling in his. Their eyes met in silence.

Then Virrel entered the room again, and in another moment Kennard was alone.

Six weeks had passed; and Gladys—motherless since her childhood—was now left fatherless as well. On the day following her father's funeral she returned, stunned and grief-stricken, to London. A telegram awaited her. It was dated from a fishing village in Scotland, and was from George Virrel. Its words were these: “Kennard is very ill. Come if possible.”

On a wet, stormy evening, twenty-four hours later, Gladys stepped out on the platform of the quiet little station at Girvan. Mr. Virrel met her.

“What news?” she gasped, seizing his arm.

“He is better—he is conscious,” answered Virrel. “I will tell you all as we go along.”

“But—his wife?” she said, trying to speak calmly.

“She died a year ago!” was the answer.

“Ah—thank God!” she said in all reverence.

Well—I don't know that there is much more to tell. Kennard, ill as he was, had gone straight to Girvan; for he had recognized from Gladys' description in her trance the village which was his wretched wife's birthplace, and where he had first met her, one ill-starred summer long ago. He found there the certificate of her death, which had taken place in the autumn of the previous year. Her lover, it appeared, had drawn her allowance until his own death some months ago. Having completed all the links in the chain of evidence which gave him back his freedom, Kennard's strength suddenly gave way, and the fever against which he had been fighting for weeks brought him almost to death's door. Virrel came down to look after him, and as we have seen, sent for Gladys.

When the sick man was strong enough to see that young lady, we will presume that he thanked her in a suitable and efficient way for the share she had had in lifting the shadow which might have clouded his life for ever. At all events, he had a very good time during his convalescence, and Virrel kindly effaced himself a good deal. Whether Kennard and Gladys *had* belonged to each other in a previous existence—a fact of which they, with Virrel, were firmly persuaded—I cannot tell; but they mutually agreed to belong to each other in this world; and a month afterwards they were married. There was one curious circumstance, by the way, connected with Kennard's illness. It was this. On his recovery he found that his mesmeric power was entirely gone. This was a matter of never-ceasing regret to Virrel. But Gladys said she thought it was just as well.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEFT IN THE LURCH.

BOB returned from town in an extremely satisfied state of mind. Fortune had favoured him almost beyond his expectations, for on driving to Messrs. Tautz and Son's well-known establishment, in order to be measured for some breeches, he was lucky enough to find a pair that had just been returned which exactly fitted him.

These he purchased on the spot, delighted to have something to fall back upon during the time his own were being made. After enjoining haste, he repaired to another celebrated emporium, and spent a small fortune in boots, gaiters, &c.

Altogether, the day's expedition proved a great success, and although quite a week, if not more, must elapse before he could array himself in the full glories of a brand new red coat, still as long as his nether limbs were suitably cased, he no longer felt afraid of appearing in the hunting field. Even General Prosieboy would not seem half so formidable when opposed by boots and breeches as immaculate as his own. As for bow-tying, Charles had promised to give him a lesson, and initiate him into all the difficulties of that delicate art.

Bob reached Straightem Court just in time to dress for dinner.

In honour of Miss Lankester he had given orders for the drawing-room to be lit up, and to this room he therefore repaired to receive his guests. The housemaids had been busy most of the forenoon, removing brown holland covers, taking up druggets, and shaking out curtains. Consequently Bob was unprepared for the gorgeousness now revealed. As he stood warming himself before the fire, with his back leaning against the solid marble mantelpiece, he looked round complacently at the old-fashioned crimson and gilt furniture, the rich velvet hangings, and elaborately decorated walls on which Cupids and cherubims were freely represented. The style of the whole thing was perhaps

rather florid, but Bob knew very little of the tenets held by the æsthetic school; he had not been educated up to the sun-flower and the lily, the bulrush and the peacock, and therefore considered the general appearance of his drawing-room highly satisfactory.

Of course, if later on, Miss Dot wished anything changed, or innovations introduced, she had only to say the word. In matters of taste, Bob was quite willing to defer his judgment to hers. Women knew a great deal more about these things than men. Besides, they had such a wonderful way of twisting chairs and tables about, and robbing them of all their formality. No room really looked habitable until touched up by a feminine hand. Perhaps Dot might like to have a new carpet. The present one, although handsome, was certainly somewhat too crude in colouring, and too suggestive of Joseph's coat. A grand piano also—he suddenly noticed that the room contained only a cottage instrument of very antiquated appearance—she must have one naturally. It should be the very first present he would make her when—when they were engaged.

Thus resolving, the door flew open, and Dr. and Miss Lankester were announced.

The blood rushed up to Bob's face as he went to greet his visitors, and shook the object of his thoughts warmly by the hand, feeling that she, at any rate, was quite an old acquaintance.

"Why, where is Mrs. Lankester?" he inquired of her husband, after they too had gone through the ceremony of hand-shaking. "You have not left her at home, surely?"

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Jarrett, that my wife was unable to accompany us," replied the doctor apologetically. "The fact of the matter is, she is subject to very bad, sick headaches, and unfortunately one attacked her this afternoon."

"I regret to hear that," said Bob politely, disappointed at Mrs. Lankester's absence, since he had been curious to see what manner of woman Dot's mother was.

"We ought perhaps to have sent and let you know," continued Dr. Lankester, "but my wife hoped, up to the very last moment, that she might be able to dine with you to-night, and so put off sending until it was too late."

"The loss is altogether mine I feel certain," returned Bob in his most cordial manner. "But I shall hope very soon to have another opportunity of making Mrs. Lankester's acquaintance. Tell her we missed her much."

But although he spoke so courteously, after the first moment he did not seem to mind doing without the mamma, as long as he had the daughter. Until now he had hardly trusted himself to look at Dot. He had felt so curiously and unaccountably shy, whilst his heart beat so fast that it seemed to him as if she must hear it. But when he had ensconced her in the most comfortable chair he could find, he summoned up sufficient courage to steal a

sidelong glance at her. Hurried as it was, it enabled him to take in all the details.

He could see that she was dressed in some sort of soft, cream-coloured material, made high to the throat, and cut in the simplest possible fashion. No frills, no furbelows, no flouncings. Perhaps if he had been entertaining a party of fine ladies, they might have called Dot's gown skimpy and old-fashioned. Certainly it displayed no artificial protuberance below the waist, or deficiency of stuff above. If it was skimpy, it was skimpy only as regarded the skirt, not the body. But whatever might have been its defects, to Bob's mind Miss Lankester's gown suited the wearer to perfection.

The clinging muslin outlined her slight form admirably, displaying its rounded curves to far better advantage than the costliest silk or satin. Above the soft, creamy folds rose her small, slender throat, and shapely, well-poised head, whose stag-like carriage was full of grace and beauty, and constituted one of her chief attractions.

There was no doubt about it, she was very pretty—prettier even than he had believed her to be; whilst the singularly honest expression of her face rendered it to him, at least, peculiarly fascinating. Then he looked critically at her father standing within a few feet of him. Doctor Lankester was a handsome man. It was easy to see from whom his daughter had inherited her good looks. He had the same straight, delicate features, the same colouring, and the same clear, grey eyes, with large black pupils, which in some lights appeared almost black. Like Dot, he was short rather than tall, but slender and perfectly proportioned.

"Well, and what have you been doing with yourself to-day, Mr. Jarrett?" Dr. Lankester asked of his host, as soon as the first bustle of their arrival had subsided. "I suppose you did not go out hunting. The meet was a long way off."

"It was," answered Bob. "And therefore I profited by the opportunity to take a run up to town."

"Indeed! And how was town looking?"

"Simply filthy. When I left here about half-past eight o'clock this morning it was the most lovely day imaginable—a bright sun and a blue sky—but as we neared London a dense curtain of fog arose, which grew thicker and thicker every moment. As for the atmosphere, it was laden with smuts, dirt, and every kind of abomination, which got into my eyes, down my throat, and up my nostrils. I never was more thankful in my life than to get back to fresh country air that did not poison one's lungs. Phew! I can feel it now."

"And yet people who live in London don't seem to mind the fogs one bit," remarked Dot.

"I suppose they get accustomed to them," returned Bob. "But

it would take me a very long time to become acclimatized." And as he spoke he began to cough, the impure air to which he was not habituated having evidently irritated his throat to a considerable degree.

Dot looked up.

"Have you got a cold, Mr. Jarrett?" she asked with concern.

"Yes, I believe I have managed to catch a slight one. Somehow or other I have felt shivery ever since my yesterday's wetting."

"Then you should take care of yourself," said Dr. Lankester in a kindly, but semi-professional manner.

"Too much bother," answered Bob lightly, with all a strong young man's disdain of coddling. "I never think anything of a cold. Besides, it's really nothing. Not worth talking about."

But as he said the words, he coughed again, and this time worse than before.

Doctor Lankester glanced at him, and saw that he was flushed, and showed every symptom of having contracted a chill.

"Very likely not," he said quietly. "But you must remember, Mr. Jarrett, that you are not used to our English climate. It is a very treacherous one, I assure you, and few people can afford to take liberties with it. The winters are often extremely severe, especially of late years, when in some parts of the country the thermometer has registered as many as twenty degrees of frost."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the butler, who announced that dinner was ready. No Englishman is ever indifferent to this acceptable summons, and Dr. Lankester at once ceased talking, and waited politely for his host to make a move.

Bob gave his arm to Dot, regretting that he had been unable to provide an agreeable, elderly lady for her father.

"It is so good of you to come in this sort of way," he said apologetically. "I wish I could have asked some people to meet you, but the fact of the matter is, I don't know anybody yet."

"I'm very glad you didn't," answered Dot with characteristic frankness. "My father and I will enjoy a quiet evening alone with you ever so much more. You see," she added brightly, "we look upon you as a novelty. You can tell us all kind of things we know little or nothing of, whereas Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Jones—dear, excellent people as they may be—only prattle away about their domestic concerns with which we are already thoroughly conversant."

Bob laughed.

"I'm so awfully afraid you'll find it dull," he said.

"Dull!" looking up at him with sparkling eyes. "That is paying yourself an exceedingly bad compliment, Mr. Jarrett. As for me, I am a pretty good hand at amusing myself. There is a great deal of enjoyment to be got out of life, if one only has a sense

of the ridiculous and cultivates the faculty of applying it to everyday trifles. Besides, you forget that a visit to Straightem Court is quite an event in our humble experience."

"Why? Did you not come here often in Captain's Straightem's time?"

"Often? No. We came exactly once a year. Every spring we were invited to a formal luncheon at the conclusion of the hunting season. We invariably met our clergyman and his wife, whom as you may imagine we see frequently, and the county solicitor and his married daughter. This lunch was evidently a duty affair. It could not possibly be mistaken for anything else. The conversation was lame and forced on both sides. We asked after the sport and the hounds, our host after our individual health, and how we had got through the winter. After these civilities had been exchanged, we fell back upon eating and drinking. As for poor Captain Straightem, it was impossible to help pitying him. He looked so superlatively miserable, and so infinitely bored. Altogether, the relief was immense when the festivity came to an end, and the strain was over. But," she concluded, pulling up short, "I ought not to talk in this sort of way, now that Captain Straightem is dead and gone."

"I am surprised at what you tell me," said Bob, who had listened attentively to his companion's observations. "I can't imagine how my uncle could have lived so near to you without getting to be on very friendly terms."

For his part, he felt convinced that if he were to see Miss Dot only a few times more, his feelings would inevitably become something even warmer than friendly. He was irresistibly drawn towards her.

"You don't seem to know much of Captain Straightem," said the young lady seriously. "If you did, you could not fancy him capable of being on what you call 'friendly terms' with people in our lowly position."

"What was he like?" asked Bob with considerable curiosity.

"He was a very gentlemanly man," she replied. "Exceedingly quiet and reserved in his manner, and always remarkably neatly dressed. Further than that, I can tell you nothing, except that somehow or other he invariably contrived to make you feel that he looked upon you as an inferior."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Bob, "but that's exactly the way some of these swells made me feel yesterday."

"Did they?" said Dot. "Then I can sympathize with you, Mr. Jarrett, for I know from experience that it is by no means a comfortable sensation. I do not mind a bit on my own account, but I do mind on father's. He is so clever and well-informed, and I can't bear to see him snubbed by people who have not as much in their whole bodies as he has in his little finger."

"And does not Dr. Lankester resent such conduct?"

"No," she answered spiritedly. "I have to resent it for him. Father has far too large a mind to take notice of trifles."

"He has a warm champion, at any rate. It must be very nice to have somebody to stick up for one," said Bob. "I only wish——"

But he was unable to conclude the sentence, for having marched down a long corridor, they had now reached the dining-room, and after seating themselves at table, were soon discussing an excellent dinner. The meal passed very pleasantly.

Dr. Lankester was not only a good talker, but had the rare art of inducing those with whom he came in contact to talk also. He would start a subject, and when it was fairly launched through the shallows of polite conversation, adopt the *rôle* of listener. Before long Bob found himself describing his life in Australia, the soil, climate, government and a hundred different things, in all of which Dr. Lankester appeared to take an interest.

Dot did not say much; nevertheless, from the animated expression of her countenance, it was easy to tell that her silence did not proceed from stupidity, but rather from modesty, youth, and a highly receptive faculty, which rendered it a delight to sit still and listen, whilst others were talking sensibly.

They lingered long over their wine. Dot had made a movement as if to leave the gentlemen to themselves, but Bob particularly requested her to remain. Consequently it was nearly a quarter past nine before they rose from table.

"Would you like to smoke a cigar, doctor?" asked Bob, "because, if so, we can go into my little snugery, provided, of course, that Miss Lankester does not object."

"Oh! never mind Dot," he answered with paternal confidence. "She is quite accustomed to the smell of tobacco, and always keeps me company over my post-prandial pipe."

Upon this, the trio adjourned to a small, cosy apartment of which Bob had taken special possession, and which being one of the oftenest used, was about the most comfortable room in the house. Three capacious easy chairs were dragged in front of the fire, and herein they seated themselves. There was something pleasant and informal about this arrangement, which the hard-working doctor, for one, highly preferred to the red-and-gold glories of the drawing-room. He had had a long day, and thoroughly enjoyed stretching his weary limbs before the hearth, and deliberately puffing away at the fragrant cigar which Bob had just handed to him.

They were settling down to a quiet, peaceful evening, when the general harmony was disturbed by the delivery of a note for Doctor Lankester.

He opened it a trifle impatiently. Calm and easy-going as he was, the moment proved inopportune. "Dear me!" he exclaimed in accents of vexation, when he had read the letter through, springing to his feet as he spoke. "This is terribly annoying, and

the worst of my profession. One never can be at rest for two minutes at a time."

"What is the matter, father?" inquired Dot.

"A summons to a bad confinement case. I must go at once. The woman's life is in danger. I wish to goodness people would give over having babies, or else that they would time their entry into the world at more convenient hours."

Poor Doctor Lankester! He was very, very tired, else he never would have spoken in this manner.

"Must you really go?" asked Bob.

"Yes, I am sorry to say I must, and that at once. The case is a very urgent one, and I should reproach myself for ever if I allowed my own love of comfort to prevent me from going to the poor creature's assistance." And he threw away his cigar, as if trying to resist temptation.

Suddenly he remembered his daughter.

"Dot, my girl," he said, addressing her, "what's to be done? I shall have to take the carriage, since every minute is of importance."

"All right, father," she answered cheerfully, "I will go and get my shawl at once."

"Stop a bit, Dot. You misunderstand my meaning. I can't possibly take you with me."

"Why not, father, can you not drop me on the road?"

"No, I have to go in quite a contrary direction. The only plan will be for you to stay here until I can send the carriage back—that is to say, if Mr. Jarrett has no objection."

Bob expressed his extreme satisfaction at the proposed arrangement. He liked Dr. Lankester uncommonly, but he liked his daughter better, and looked forward with delight to a most agreeable *tête-à-tête*.

But the young lady did not altogether appear to relish the idea. A shade of displeasure passed over her sunny face.

"I think that I had better come with you, father," she said in the same tones of gentle dignity Bob remembered her using once before. "I could wait in the carriage, just as well as here."

"No," he replied. "It would only fidget me to think that you were there. Besides, it is quite likely I may have to send Tomson into town, to fetch medicines at the dispensary, in which case you might never get home all night. Leave it to me, and I will either send the carriage back as soon as possible, or else order a fly."

"I can walk back," said Dot resolutely. "It's no distance, and my shoes are tolerably thick."

Evidently the *tête-à-tête* was not to her mind, or else she disliked its being forced upon her without her giving her consent.

While this discussion was going on, Bob stood by, feeling a perfect beast. There were horses enough and carriages enough too in his stables, doing nothing at that very moment, but he

never offered to produce them for Miss Lankester's benefit. The single brougham would have conveyed her most snugly back to her home. Yet he said not a word.

The truth was, his imagination had taken fire at the bare thought of getting Dot all alone to himself for half an hour, or with good luck, perhaps even a whole one. He felt thoroughly ashamed of his conduct. He did not attempt to excuse it in any way, but the temptation was too strong to be resisted, and he maintained an obstinate silence. Even when once the girl looked appealingly at him, he made no offer of lending a vehicle. Dot on her side, though she knew quite well that there were any number in the coachhouse, was far too proud to beg for the loan of one. Only for the first time, she experienced a kind of hostility against her host. He might have helped her out of her difficulty, and he had refused to do so.

"Well," said Dr. Lankester, giving himself a stretch, "there's no peace for the wicked, and I must be off. Good night, Jarrett. Thanks for your hospitality."

"And am I really to stay here, father?" asked poor Dot in consternation.

"Yes, child. I thought we had settled all that. I will send the carriage back if I can, but if it is not here by half-past ten, and I am unable to get a fly, I have no doubt that Mr. Jarrett will kindly let one of his men-servants see you safely home."

"I will see her home myself," said Bob effusively, suddenly finding his tongue, now that matters were definitively arranged according to his desires.

"All right, then; I leave her in your hands." And so saying Dr. Lankester hurried off, leaving his daughter a prey to a whole host of curiously mixed sensations.

In many ways the village doctor was a strangely simple and unworldly man. Despite his forty odd years, it apparently never entered his head to think that there was anything the least unusual in letting Dot remain by herself, at a tolerably late hour of night, in the house of a young bachelor acquaintance who, most ordinary people would have perceived, admired her immensely.

He would have been astounded if any one had suggested such a thing.

But Dot's perceptions were sharper.

Her maidenly instincts rebelled against the situation.

She knew the innocence and simplicity of her father's nature, but for once she wished that he possessed a little more of that worldly cunning of which her mother owned so large a share.

She liked Mr. Jarrett very much. He was very kind, very nice, very polite. But every now and then she had felt his eyes fixed upon her in an embarrassing manner, and once when she looked up, and happened to intercept their gaze, there was a look in them which troubled her not a little.

She could not understand it, and Dot Lankester was a young woman who did not care for things she did not understand.

CHAPTER XX.

AN OFFER OF A "MOUNT."

BOB saw Dr. Lankester out at the hall door as in courtesy bound; and for a minute or two Dot was left to her own resources. During this time she took herself seriously to task for her disinclination to be left alone with Mr. Jarrett. It really was ridiculous to mind, and it would be doubly, trebly absurd to allow him to guess that she experienced any reluctance. She had already stated her wish to accompany her father, but since he had decided otherwise, the best plan now was to try and appear totally unconcerned, and altogether at her ease. Even delicacy might be carried to too great an extent. Luckily her conscience was free. The situation had been none of her choosing, and undoubtedly the wisest course was to attach as little importance to it as possible. In this manner did she argue, endeavouring, by the aid of common sense and calm reasoning, to make light of the whole business. She succeeded so far that by the time Bob re-entered the room she contrived to smother the temporary resentment she had felt against him, and to all appearances was quiet, indifferent and self-possessed. But she did not attempt to commence the conversation, and for a few seconds a somewhat awkward silence prevailed. If Dot's conscience was at rest, Bob's was far from being so. He could not divest himself of an inward conviction that he had behaved traitorously towards his guest. Moreover he entertained an uncomfortable belief that she shared the same opinion, and in her innermost mind criticized his conduct severely. Well, he must try and make up for past misdemeanours, and do all he could to regain her esteem.

Dot had risen from her seat, and was now standing leaning with one arm against the mantelpiece, in a pose full of unconscious grace. The bright flames from the fire cast flickering shadows on her light dress and grave, downcast face. They lit up her soft brown tresses with gleams of gold, and made the small head and slender pillar-like throat stand out in high relief against the dark oak panelling.

A thrill went through Bob's frame as he looked at her. She had no positive claim to beauty, but her air of quiet refinement, her youth, her freshness, her total freedom from coquetry, rendered her in his eyes the most attractive woman he had ever come across. He admired her immensely, and yet he feared her a little. He doubted the reception his advances might meet with. She inspired an unusual sense of self-distrust and timidity. Therefore

he resolved to be more than commonly prudent, to guard against any hasty impulse carrying him away, and above all, to do and say nothing that might directly or indirectly give the alarm to her maidenly susceptibilities. Miss Lankester and Lady De Fochsey were evidently two very different types of womanhood. The same plan of procedure could not be indiscriminately adopted with them both.

At last the silence grew so prolonged that Bob was constrained to break it.

"Will you not sit down, Miss Lankester?" he said in studiously correct tones. "You will get tired of standing." And he drew the chair she had already occupied a trifle nearer.

It must be owned that Dot did not receive this suggestion very graciously. Before replying she glanced at the clock; then, with a suppressed sigh of impatience, answered:

"Yes, I suppose I may as well. The carriage can't possibly be here just yet."

Bob felt nettled by the remark. It implied a desire to escape at the very earliest opportunity.

"You seem in a most tremendous hurry to get away," he said with considerable asperity. "I am sorry that you should be so awfully bored."

Dot blushed up to the very roots of her hair.

"Oh! no indeed," she said lamely, "I'm not the least bit bored."

"Are you not? Then all I can say is, your manner belies your words. Is there nothing I can do to amuse you? Don't you even care to look at books or photographs, since you appear disinclined to talk?"

"I don't want amusing, Mr. Jarrett. You labour under a mistake in fancying that I do."

"So you said before. But from personal observation I am rude enough to disbelieve the statement. If you were contented where you are, you would not count the minutes quite so anxiously."

"You seem to forget that we country people are early birds," rejoined Dot, with an attempt at archness, "who become sleepy and stupid unless we go to roost at our accustomed hour."

"Am I to understand, then, that you retire to rest at half-past nine every day of your life?"

"Well, no, not perhaps quite so early."

"You are tired on this particular evening? Is that it?"

"No, not at all."

"Not bored, not tired!" said Bob musingly. "Then I can only arrive at one solution."

He waited for a moment, as if hoping his companion would inquire what it was, but as she did not speak, he went on more warmly: "The fact of the matter is, Miss Lankester, you still persist in treating me like a stranger, from whom all manner of evil is to be expected. Do you imagine I am going to eat you?"

And he turned a pair of very reproachful eyes upon her, whose injured expression seemed to render her shortcomings painfully apparent.

She gave a forced laugh, and blamed herself for having been so ridiculously prudish.

"No. I do not flatter myself that I should prove a very palatable morsel; and as for being a stranger—were you not one only quite a short while ago?"

"Yes. It is kind of you to remind me of the fact," he answered stiffly, "though I was in no danger of forgetting it." Then, determined not to quarrel with her, he added in a gentler key: "It was my fault, of course, but somehow or other when you were so good as to help me through my gate difficulty, I was foolish enough to imagine that you were a little more human and not quite so ceremonious as the rest of them."

This time Dot laughed outright. His remarks were extremely naïve, and made her begin to wonder why she had distrusted him.

"Come, Mr. Jarrett, confess. Do I look very ceremonious at the present moment?" lying back in the arm-chair with a gesture of abandonment, and resting her small brown head against the cushions, whilst her eyes shone with fun and mischief.

Both the words and the attitude pleased him, and took away his sense of soreness.

"No, I can't say that you do. But you did a little while ago, when you were in two minds about sitting down."

"And do you really think me as bad as the 'rest of them?'" mimicking his aggrieved tones.

"I shan't reply to that question, for fear my answer might offend you," responded Bob, his face beaming with delight, this sudden transition to a playful mood making the blood course like wildfire through his veins. Then, with a strong effort he controlled the desire to tell her his exact thoughts, and said hesitatingly:

"Of course you know very little about me at present, Miss Dot—I beg pardon, I mean Miss Lankester—but—but," beginning to flounder in his speech, "I should like to set your mind at rest in one particular."

"What is that, Mr. Jarrett? I was not aware my mind was uneasy."

"Yes, it is. Excuse me for contradicting you so flatly, but I can see it quite plainly. The real truth is, you are afraid of me, and—and," turning very red, "upon my soul you need not be."

The blush on her companion's face reproduced itself on Dot's.

"I'm not afraid of you—not a bit," she vowed more emphatically than truthfully, for she felt humiliated by Bob's declaration, and by the keenness of his perceptions.

"Oh! I thought you were."

She plucked up sufficient courage to ask, "Why?"

"Because you showed so very plainly your dislike to being left alone in my society."

He had been piqued by her conduct, and man-like could not conceal his pique as a woman would have done. It might not be wise to speak out thus freely on so short an acquaintance, but for the life of him, he could not hold his tongue.

Dot, however, felt too guilty to attempt to deny the accusation. She only marvelled at his powers of penetration, having hitherto flattered herself that she had managed to disguise her sentiments pretty well. Either she must have acted her part very badly, or Mr. Jarrett must be a good deal sharper than most gentlemen.

Fortunately for Dot, Bob having secretly enjoyed the confusion depicted upon her countenance, was generous enough to start the conversation afresh, and this time in a different channel. He had no intention of pressing her too sorely. His object had merely been to let her see he was not wholly devoid of observation. She was a bad dissembler, and in his heart of hearts he liked her all the better for it. A girl who could tell stories readily, must have a flaw somewhere in her composition.

"Don't you ever go out hunting, Miss Lankester?" he inquired.

In a second, Dot's whole manner changed. A wonderful thaw set in. All the coldness and the frigidity vanished as if by magic. They were on safe ground at last, and she was her own, natural self again. The need of defence, which constitutes a maiden's armour, departed.

"Oh! yes, sometimes," she answered vivaciously. "But not very often, I'm sorry to say."

"How's that?"

"Father won't allow me to go alone, and it is only on very rare occasions that he can steal a holiday."

"Is Dr. Lankester fond of the sport?"

"He loves it, when he gets the chance. Do you know," and Dot lowered her voice confidentially, "nobody goes better than father, when he happens to be mounted on a decent horse, which, however, is not often. Every one declares what a wonderful eye he has got for a country, and how marvellously quick he is in following hounds."

"And do you go where he does?" inquired Bob with interest, though he did not like the idea of Dot's delicate frame being exposed to danger.

"I used to always," she answered proudly. "But," stifling a sigh, "the last year or two poor Mouse has failed sadly. She is very old and has quite lost her speed."

"Why don't you get another horse, then?" asked Bob somewhat inconsiderately.

She looked at him. Even the sharpest men were curiously dense in some ways.

"For the very simple reason, Mr. Jarrett, that my father is,

comparatively speaking, a poor man, and we cannot afford to indulge in many expensive amusements. If we could, we should both go out hunting a very great deal more frequently than we do."

"In short," said Bob, "you have nothing to ride but Mouse."

"No, nothing, but I am very lucky to have her, and it is only when hounds happen to run really hard, and I hear her poor heart go pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, under me, and have the mortification of seeing everybody pass me by, that I can't help feeling annoyed, and envying people who are better mounted than myself. It is so delightful to be on a good horse," she continued enthusiastically, "and not always to have to think of cutting off corners, and easing up hills, and walking through ploughs. Besides, nothing puts one off one's riding more, than following some cunning old hand, who knows every gate in the country, and who pulls up at each gap in turn, to inquire of the multitude what sort of a place it is, and then either gallops swiftly away, or takes ten minutes making up his mind whether he will or will not, according to the nature of the answers received. It ruins a person's nerve."

"I should dearly like to lend you one of my horses," said Bob eagerly. "There are ever so many more in the stables than I want for my own use, and I feel sure two or three of them would carry a lady to perfection."

Dot's face brightened at the mere suggestion. She was passionately fond of fox-hunting, and of everything connected therewith. Her love of sport was genuine, and inherited from her father, who came of a good horse-racing Yorkshire family. Bob could not possibly have held out a greater temptation. Nevertheless, she had many scruples as to accepting the offer so generously made. To begin with, it would place her under an obligation.

"You are very kind, Mr. Jarrett," she said gratefully. "More than kind, indeed, to hint at such a thing; but I do not think my father would allow me to ride any one else's horses. There is always a certain amount of risk about the proceeding, and if there was a good scent, and I got warmed up, I could not help 'going' and doing my very best to keep with hounds."

"I'll take all the risk," he answered. "Come," persuasively, "what do you say? If I can succeed in overcoming Dr. Lankester's objections, will you grant me this small favour—for it is one, I assure you—and let me have the pleasure of mounting you now and again?"

Dot hesitated before replying. It was awfully nice of him, he was quite restored to her good graces, but—ought she to yield to the temptation however great it might be, and was? What was the use of her cultivating her taste for hunting, when the circumstances of her life were such that in all probability she would have very little opportunity of gratifying it hereafter. And then Dot's imagination wandered far away.

"Well, what do you say?" Bob asked again. "Can't you make up your mind?"

She looked him straight in the face with clear and kindly eyes. She was touched by the sincerity of his offer.

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Jarrett, except to thank you for your most generous proposition."

"But that is no answer, Miss Lankester. None whatever."

"It is the only one I can give at the present moment."

"May I speak to your father? Have I your permission?"

"I—I—think you had better not." And she began twisting her pocket-handkerchief about.

But in spite of these words, Bob could see by her manner that she was yielding. If he pressed the point only a very little more he would overrule her objections; and then—what cross-country delights, what feats performed together, what long, delicious rides home in the frosty twilight! His pulses thrilled at the mere thought of them. There would no longer be any question of scheming to obtain a miserable half-hour of her society. And when she was pleased and amused, and owed her pleasure and amusement to him, perhaps she might grow to care for him a little bit.

CHAPTER XXI.

BOB MAKES A BAD USE OF HIS OPPORTUNITIES.

CAN even the best of men help their thoughts being selfish, especially when their passions are aroused? It is questionable. At all events, there was a leaven of self-interest in those that instantaneously rose to Bob's mind. He could not refrain from realizing that in benefiting Dot, he would benefit himself a hundred thousand times more. Consequently he grew increasingly urgent.

"I shall attack your father the very next time I see him," he said decidedly. "It's a downright shame for you not to have a good horse when you ride so well, and are so fond of hunting."

His energy and determination quite carried Dot away. She felt as if it were almost impossible to resist them, when directly subjected to their influence; for there are qualities which, when displayed by one of the opposite sex, possess a strange power of subjugating a woman, even against her better judgment. She likes to find all her objections answered, all her scruples overruled just now and again. It makes her say to herself: "Well! I have done a foolish thing, but it really was not my fault. I had no choice left me."

So instead of sticking to her colours, Dot deserted them basely, and said with a faint smile, for she was conscious of her weakness, and condemned it:

"I am afraid that if I let you have your way, you will spoil me altogether, Mr. Jarrett."

"Spoil you!" he ejaculated. "By jingo! I only wish I had the chance. Should you object to being spoilt by me, Miss Lankester?"

The question slipped out almost before he was aware of it, and then he could have bitten off the tip of his tongue, in his fear of having gone too far.

It was almost a relief, and yet—with the contrariety of masculine nature, he could not help feeling vexed as well, to find no reply forthcoming. Indeed, Dot appeared not to have heard the interrogation. Her face assumed an anxious, listening expression.

"Hark," she said, "is not that the sound of wheels?"

"No, I don't hear anything," rejoined Bob shortly, wishing the expected conveyance at the bottom of the sea.

"I'm almost sure it was the carriage," she said uneasily.

"Oh! never mind if it is. It's so jolly sitting here talking, and there's no hurry."

She began moving restlessly about the room. Presently she said, unable to control her impatience any longer:

"Mr. Jarrett, I feel certain the carriage is here. Would you mind ringing the bell and asking?"

It was impossible to refuse so direct a request. Bob reluctantly did her bidding. But when the man-servant appeared, it seemed that Dot's ears had played her false. No vehicle had arrived.

"Are you sure?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes, miss, quite sure. I looked out of the 'all door myself just 'afore I came up."

"It's very odd," she said, rising to her feet as soon as Charles had withdrawn. "Something must have happened, or else father has forgotten all about me."

"That's not the least likely," said Bob. "Daughters can't be ignored altogether so easily."

"Well, anyhow, I must be going."

He felt provoked by her persistence. It showed him plainly that he had not succeeded in setting her at ease.

"Without exception," he exclaimed, half in jest, half in earnest, "you are the most fidgety and tenacious person I ever encountered."

"Thank you," she replied, dropping him a mock courtesy. "Anything else?"

"May I ask, Miss Lankester, how you intend to get home?"

She walked across the room, and drawing one of the curtains a little aside, looked out of the window. Just at first she could distinguish nothing, but after a few seconds she saw the stars shining with frosty radiance, and a big white moon illumining all the heavens with her cold and mystic rays. It might be a bit chilly out of doors, but at any rate there was no fear of rain. The night was calm and still, the lawn already whitening over with

silvery hoar frost. Her resolution was taken without delay. There could be no reason why she should wait any longer.

"I shall walk."

"By Jove! No, that you shan't," he protested.

"Who is to prevent me?" a spirit of opposition rising within her breast.

"I will. If you really are in earnest about going, my brougham is of course at your disposal."

"Thank you very much," she rejoined, in tones which he could not help fancying conveyed a touch of reproach, "but it is too late—now."

Without doubt, there was an emphasis on the last word. The blood flew to his face.

"Spare me," he cried, with impetuous self-accusation. "I know quite well what a beast I have been, and that I ought to have ordered out the brougham ever so long ago."

"There was no law to render the action obligatory," said Dot coldly.

"Perhaps not, but I knew that you did not like being left here, and wanted to get away."

"You need not blame yourself, Mr. Jarrett. I stayed by my father's wish."

"Yes, but I did all I could to keep you. There! now the murder is out." And Bob gazed penitently at her. "Had I chosen, I might have helped you out of your difficulty in a second."

No doubt he had his faults, but he was a good fellow, and honest to the core. She could not feel angry with him for long, especially when he looked so contrite for what, after all, was only a small offence. Besides, it was making a mountain out of a mole-hill.

"It seems to me," she said pleasantly, "that if you have failed as a host, I have failed as a guest, so we may as well cry quits, and make our peace. Good-bye, Mr. Jarrett." And she put out her hand.

"You are not going to walk home, surely?" he said.

"Yes, I am. It is only a step, and nobody will run away with me."

"I can't possibly let you go like this," he expostulated in genuine distress. "Do wait a little longer."

"Out of the question. It has already struck half-past ten, and mother will be wondering what has become of us. She does not know that father may have to spend the night away from home."

Bob admitted the force of this objection, and accompanied his companion down the corridor that led to the hall. As he passed a hat-stand he seized his hat.

"What is that for?" asked Dot.

"To put on my head. I am coming with you."

"Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Jarrett! I can't allow you to do any such thing. You have been to London to-day and are certainly tired, and have a bad cold into the bargain."

"Excuse me, Miss Lankester, but you must let me have my own

way in this. I have failed in my duty as host once—you yourself have just said so—and I hope it may be a long time before I make a similar mistake."

Dot was in consternation. To use a vulgar simile, she felt that she had only jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. And yet there was an air of decision about Bob which effectually prevented her from indulging in any further remonstrances. It was quite clear that whether she approved, or whether she didn't, he intended to abide by his decision. She liked him, too, in this authoritative mood. The manliness of his nature came out.

She actually let him wrap her up in one of his great-coats, and stood quite meekly whilst he buttoned the buttons. He was awfully slow about it, but she did not attempt to hasten his movements. For the time being he had gained a certain mastery over her.

But when he handed her a warm shooting cap, and insisted upon her putting it on, she once more found her tongue. He was so portentously serious that she felt bound to make light of the situation.

"I declare," she said, looking saucily up at him from under the projecting peak of her head-gear, "you have turned me into a regular man. How do I look? Like a masher?"

"Look!" he echoed, his head going from him all of a sudden, "as you always do—charming."

She turned her head away, and said petulantly:

"For goodness sake, Mr. Jarrett, don't treat me like a fashionable young lady, to whom compliments are as the salt of existence. I hate them—nasty, insincere things."

"But they are not always insincere," responded Bob in self-defence.

"In that case, they are superfluous. And now shall we make a start?"

Bob's spirits felt thoroughly damped. He did not offer to make any reply to this speech. One thing was clear: Dot Lankester wholly differed from the majority of her sex. She was not to be approached through her vanity. A strange girl this, who grew positively angry when men professed to admire her, but how charming a one to the lucky fellow whose admiration she might deign to receive. Bob wondered if the "lucky fellow" existed, and grew miserable at the mere thought. Then he comforted himself by arguing that she was so young. She did not look a day over eighteen, and it was not likely in this quiet country village that anybody had already snapped her up. Besides, she did not seem like a girl given to matrimony, but very much the reverse. He should not take his rebuffs quite so deeply to heart if he could but make sure there were no rivals in the field. The very idea of some great, hairy man (other than himself) having the right to put his arm round Dot's waist, and kiss her little, flower-like face, filled

him with anger and disgust. An Australian might possibly be worthy of her, but an Englishman—never!

Meanwhile they walked down the drive in absolute silence.

The spreading trees with bare, black twigs formed a canopy over their heads, through whose interstices shone the darkling sky, deep indigo in hue; whilst the cold stars glittered like diamond facets, and the big moon cast sharp shadows on the path, which made the white road even whiter, when contrasted with their sombre outlines.

Night, with its still serenity, had hushed mother earth to sleep, and the stars and the moon and the pure vaulted sky guarded the weary, fretful, restless dame's slumbers. Peace descended with the mystic frost, that touched the trees with ghostly fingers and fantastically laid on every blade of grass a hoary rime which would have done credit to a fairy's web.

Peace, and silence, and solemnity—these were the characteristics of the hour, and yet Bob's poor, passionate heart, that joy or curse of human beings, beat with tumultuous beats. Scarce could he stifle his emotion. The calm of his surroundings failed to quiet it. For—and a great yearning flooded his being at the thought—he was so near to her and yet so far!

So near—that if he stretched out his hand, he could have taken hers in his; so far—that in giving the slightest expression to his sentiments, he at once raised up a barrier between them. Once, as they walked along, she stumbled over some fallen stone which lay in the road, and he offered her his arm. Oh! how he longed for her to take it—to feel her little wrist quivering upon his sleeve.

He dare not speak, he only shot one mute glance of appeal from his veiled and troubled eyes.

She refused the proffered member with a stately gesture of the head.

Bob literally trembled as he walked by her side. It was ridiculous. He had never been afraid of any one in his life before. There were some who even accused him of being an audacious flirt, and yet this little slip of a girl, who was hardly more than a child, rendered him as timid and as hesitating as a hare just startled from its form. If this was love, surely he had taken the epidemic in a very disagreeable form; and if it were not love, what else could it be?

They continued down the avenue, until they passed through the iron gates which separated the Park from the village. Emerging from the shadow of the trees a flood of brilliant moonlight greeted them, converting every homely red-brick cottage into a veritable work of art.

It enveloped Dot's girlish form in one sheet of radiance, and lit up each feature of her expressive young face. Her companion's attention was arrested by its rapt and dreamy look. If his thoughts had strayed, hers had evidently wandered also, for she never even

noticed his steady gaze, or heard the sigh with which, at last, he forced himself to withdraw his eyes.

The influences of night prevailed. A spell descended upon them both, though it worked differently. *He* thought only of *her*. She?—Ah! who can travel the paths along which a maiden's fancies meander.

Soon they stood under the rustic porch of Dr. Lankester's house.

Then Dot woke up from her dream, and gave a long, soft sigh.

"Is anything the matter?" said Bob anxiously. "Are you cold?"

"Not a bit, thank you. I can't tell you how I have enjoyed the walk home."

"I'm glad to hear it," he answered, feeling flattered even in spite of the conviction that her enjoyment was not attributable to him.

"It has been such a lovely evening, and—" lowering her voice, "I was thinking——"

Of whom? He burned to ask the question, but did not dare.

She gave herself a little shake as if to shake her spirit free of some enchantment.

"It is too late to ask you in," she said, "but I hope you will come another time."

"You have only to give the invitation for me to accept it, Miss Lankester."

Then, as they were on the point of parting, her conscience smote her for having behaved a trifle ungraciously to him. If only he could once be brought to understand, all would go well; but she could not offer her undivided friendship until that point had been reached. In the meantime she was sorry to have rendered his evening less agreeable than he had anticipated.

She guessed this to be the case from his altered and downcast manner.

"Good night, Mr. Jarrett," she said frankly. "I am afraid I have proved a very bad companion. Will you forgive me all my shortcomings?"

His face brightened instantaneously. The demand was put with such an air of pretty penitence.

"You have not got any shortcomings for me to forgive."

"Under the circumstances, you are very indulgent," she answered with a smile.

That smile was fatal. It made him forget all his good resolutions. The blood rushed up to his boyish face, and he said impulsively:

"It is pleasure enough for me to be near you, even when you on't care to talk. I should never ask for more."

And then he was frightened—frightened at the effect his words would produce. Do not laugh at him. The truest wooers are often the most bashful.

Moonbeam after moonbeam poured into the porch, as they stood waiting for the door to be opened. By their light he

could see her eyes narrow, the delicate brow contract, and the whole expression of her face change. He cursed his own imprudence.

"Mr. Jarrett," she said in a constrained voice, "you expressed a wish that you and I should be friends. Please understand distinctly that I cannot undertake to remain so unless you give up the habit of making flowery speeches on every possible and impossible occasion."

"I—I'm awfully sorry," muttered Bob in abject confusion, wringing her hand in a vice-like grasp. "Good-bye, I won't do it again, and—and—I shan't forget about the horse," striding hastily away.

The horse? Did he think he could bribe her with that?

"Mr. Jarrett," she called after him, in a clear voice, "wait one minute, please. I have something to say."

"Yes," stopping short, "what is it?"

"About your kind offer—I—I can't accept it."

"You can't! Why not?"

"Because I feel convinced that it would be better for me not to do so."

And with this exceedingly unsatisfactory reply Dot vanished into the house, leaving Bob to trudge back to Straightem Court in the worst of humours and the lowest possible spirits.

For he saw quite clearly that the fortress was not to be carried by a *coup de main*.

In his ardour he had imagined there would be no delay—his courtship would go smoothly. He would pay Miss Lankester a great deal of attention, to which she would respond in a suitable manner; then propose and be accepted. That was how the course of true love should always run, and how he had mapped it out in his own mind.

And now, instead of a swift, impetuous channel, coursing madly down towards the smiling ocean of matrimony, he saw nothing but a little devious stream, blocked by every kind of impediment. His ideas had been subjected to a very severe shock.

He realized that Dot Lankester could not be "rushed" into marriage. He had been in far too great a hurry. Instead of going to work cautiously, and inspiring her first with confidence, then friendship, and finally with the desired passion, he had made a mess of the whole business, and done nothing but establish a feeling of constraint which would now take several days, if not weeks, to efface. In short, he had frightened her. He knew it by the tone of her voice and the look of her eyes. And as Bob retraced his footsteps he blamed himself bitterly for having made such exceedingly bad use of the opportunity that had been granted him.

(To be continued).

MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING.

A REMINISCENCE.

By MAC-WEBER,

AUTHOR OF "OUT OF THE SNOW," "THE STORY OF A SORROW," ETC., ETC.

"There was never yet philosopher,
That could endure the toothache patiently,"
SHAKESPEARE—" *Much Ado About Nothing*."

"A NIGHT of torture—intoxicated toothache—Charlie laughed." Was ever such an extraordinary combination found in a lady's memorandum-book before? The above extract was not taken from my diary. The little memorandum-book in which the above note occurs contains merely a brief jotting-down of the day's occurrences.

As for my diary—it, like its owner, is the possessor of a decided originality.

In it I make anything but laconic comments on everything and everybody that attracts my observation; it is a kind of mirror, reflecting myself, my doings and all things appertaining thereto. Charlie, the aforementioned individual, declares that my diary (if published) would realize a *fortune*, and all because of its originality. This little memorandum-book of mine had lain by unnoticed and forgotten for ten years, and, it is as likely as not, it might have remained another twenty, had it not been that one morning I was seized with the fancy to *turn out* my store-room—a treasure room—in which no domestic ever was allowed to remain alone. I am full of fancies—originalities, Charlie calls them—as my store-room shows—lumber-room, some people irreverently designate it, to my intense disgust. Here rest, not the graves, but the relics of my great-grandmother, grandmother, and my own dear mother. How I handle *her* things—how reverently I lift them up and lay them down! I knew her and I loved her; the other things belong to those I have only heard of. *Lumber-room*, can it be called? I could go to one large chest and bring out a piece of faded silk, *only a bit of faded silk*—but, it is a piece of my mother's wedding-dress: and I could sit the whole day before it, weaving in fancy all she felt, thought, and did before and after that dress was worn. Perhaps I do gather in and keep together a small collection of rubbish; but admitting that, I can, and do say,

my store-room holds many precious things: for which is often the most valuable—the *things*, or the associations encircling them?

The morning of which I speak found me determined to turn everything topsy-turvy, and in doing so, I came upon a small box that had been concealed by some more important packages, and in its corner had remained unnoticed.

“Hidden treasures!” I exclaimed; and delighted at this discovery, I ransacked my basket of keys. I knew it—the key, I mean—must be among them; so I dived down deep to the bottom, and bringing out a handful of small keys, I tried first one and then another till I turned the lock, and the little box unfolded its contents, which were books, papers, &c.

Down on the floor I went, and making a chair-back of a large chest, I began a discovery.

What a strange and amusing pleasantness there is in turning over a long-laid-by package!

We come across forgotten treasures, that may have gained or lost with past years—how memory is awake—we laugh—we smile—and maybe we sigh—and then our occupation becomes a sorrowful pleasantness. My re-discovered treasure turned out to be school-day associations—a number of letters and small daily memorandum-book. It must have got there by chance, as it was of a much later date than the rest of the contents of the box. What a treat I shall have some day, I thought, as I replaced papers, &c., leaving out for the present only the little book.

“Dear me!” I continued as I turned over its leaves, “this is better than the newest book from Mudie’s!” “Charlie”—and as my eyes caught the name, I stayed the turning leaves and read—“Charlie asked me to-day. I said ‘yes.’ I couldn’t help it!”

Now memory’s chord is touched, and, odd as it might be to any one else, I understood the meaning. In straightforward, common-place language it said that Charlie had asked me to marry him, and that I had said I would. Certainly, I must say, it sounded rather strange to add, “I couldn’t help it!” but explanation wonderfully simplifies matters.

So to explain: I must tell you that long before I knew Charlie Middleton I had *quite* made up my mind to be an old maid; for I had a yearly income sufficient for reasonable luxuries—and I had also a disgust for men who sought women because of their incomes. I knew I had a heart to give, but it must be received without any jewelled setting. Perhaps I had almost wished I was a poor girl; certainly, to marry I must love—must be loved; and, as a fairly rich woman, I concluded fate had meant me to be *alone* in life.

And so somehow when I had said yes to Charlie, I felt I had taken fate into my own hands; and the only comfort I could find was in the explanatory excuse, “I couldn’t help it!”

True enough! for if I had said "*No*," it would have been one way of digging my own grave.

I believed I was fated to be an old maid; but when Charlie came I felt I was designed for him and he for me. The little memorandum brought all this back to me.

But what is this? I said to myself, as I read "*A night of torture. Intoxicated toothache. Charlie laughed.*"

"Strange," I continued, dissecting the mysterious entry. "*A night of torture*" was possible to solve. I might have had a treat of nightmare—or even a ghostly visitor was possible, if not probable. Then "*Charlie laughed*;" that, too, was by no means an impossibility, and was no uncommon occurrence—but "*Intoxicated toothache!*"

I ransacked my brains, to throw any light upon the matter, until in my bewildering wonderment I read on the preceding page,

"Come to Arden Lodge." Here *was* the clue; how I laughed! Charlie says my musical laugh first attracted him. Arden Lodge was the clue. I remember, in the years gone by, that I had a set of even pearly teeth, but the most cantankerous that any poor, or rich, mortal could possibly be blest with; their occasional fits of quarrelling jarred the entire of my nervous system. My dentist *smilingly* told me "I suffered from the toothache," whilst my doctor comforted me with the information that "I was a martyr to neuralgia." I myself insisted that it was the natural irritability of those pearly members that produced such unpleasant results. It so happened that just about the time I was due to spend a week at Arden Lodge, I had to my great horror symptoms of an outbreak among these troublesome subjects, and I exhorted them to good behaviour for a few days.

"Teeth!" I said, "in mercy keep the peace, at least till I have had my stay among my friends and I return home, where I can better battle with you; for often have you interfered with my peace of mind and personal appearance, when both conditions were of no small importance to me; but I will forget all, if only there will be peace among you till this visit is over."

Thus I talked and wheedled into what I thought at least a *truce*, for the week that was to be spent at Arden Lodge. I wanted to go *very* much (Charlie was to be there the whole of the time). As I thought of these things and those times I was again going over that week, and my store-room was forgotten.

Pleasantly, ay happily, the first few days slipped away; so far it was the happiest visit I had ever had.

I think it was the night of the fourth day that found me unusually wearied. I longed to lay down my head and sleep. I glanced at the two pillows that were invitingly waiting for my drowsy head, and thought how gladly should I nestle down and speedily be lost to everything in the balmy sleep that was even then stealing over me. I wanted to be well rested for the morning;

there was a secret surprise and pleasant outing planned for the next day, which I knew I should enjoy; and of course I must be looking my best. I was going to regret women's vanity; but, do men never know occasions when they also desire to be looking their best? And so I must be freshest of the fresh, after the forthcoming sleep. No premonitory notice had I of what was *to be* between the now and then, for no shadow of an ache presented itself; I even regarded with unusual satisfaction and admiration the brilliant appearance of my teeth.

Quickly preparing for the much-coveted rest, soon my head was in its desired haven, and in a few minutes I must have been lost in sleep's strange unconsciousness. One o'clock sounded from the hall clock. What had awoken me so soon, I marvelled? I knew it was exactly twelve when I had last looked at my watch, so *something* must have happened to so quickly break my soothing slumbers.

A sudden twitch from my mouth to my left eyebrow discovered the cause of my unexpected wakefulness. Doubtless, numerous twinges like this one had at last roused my wearied frame.

What was I to do! Realizing that there was punishment in store for me, I sat up, and cogitated how to avoid or bear it. Holding my head first on one hand, then on the other, rubbing the side of my face that seemed the most inclined to irritability, I wildly caught at the idea, if I rolled my head in flannel and made them warm and comfortable, they might be disposed to condone the offence. Doing so, I lay down and waited the result. No, the battle had begun, and it was evident that they had no intention to have their sport spoilt, unless I could prove myself a conqueror.

My will is by no means weak, indeed, most people who know me assert that it is quite the reverse; so I settled that now it should be my staff. I *would* lie perfectly still, and *bear*, until they were tired out.

For a few minutes I was brave, and employed myself in analyzing the strange warfare going on. Suppose the whole of my face were a mass of fine wires, running hither and thither, wires interlacing each other from all sides and points. Then, following up the analyzation, imagine all these wires at work, like the telegraph set in motion, and the result may be judged.

Could my will, be it ever so iron-like, bear this?

I clenched my hands; I tried to believe it was interesting to bear and study the odd performance. No, it could not be borne; for I was no Spartan maiden. I had kept quiet till almost maddened. I started up, and, throwing off all wraps I had donned, in hopes of pacifying my tormentors, I madly paced up and down the room. My oft-used and only remedy was not at hand; but remembrance brought to mind that I had heard that cold water

held in the mouth would sometimes relieve poor suffering mortals like myself.

Seizing hold of the water bottle and tumbler, I once again sought my couch, and propping myself up with those pillows which but a couple of hours ago had held out such delusive hopes of rest and sleep, I began my war. These objectionable teeth objected to warmth—what of the cold-bath system? Grand! a cessation of hostilities! With a mouth streaming with cold water I had peace, ay, peace. I was content. I almost forgave my tormentors for their past cruelty.

But I wanted sleep, and a cold bath, though only indulged in by my mouth, did not seem exactly the right thing to admit of it. Of course, it was but reasonable, after a time, I must free my mouth from its bath. Then, instantaneously, and as if by magic, the wires began again more powerful than ever, as if they were refreshed and strengthened for the renewed battle by the tonic-giving bath.

The torture was maddening, still I must be thankful that I had found a temporary lull. So there was nothing to do but to relinquish the thought of sleep, and apply the cold-water remedy till my foes were subdued. At length the end came—my water bottle was empty—my foes were unconquered—and I had lost my only weapon of defence—and now they began in real earnest.

Talk of tortures of past ages! inquisition performances, &c.—none ever surpassed what I was doomed to suffer after my cold-water supply failed. There seemed imaginary operators, with their instruments of extraction adjusted round each tooth in my mouth. Now, if there had been one tremendous tug, and no more, I could have borne it; in fact, I verily believe I should have bestowed my blessing upon the spirits of dentistry. But this new science of extraction which I was undergoing consisted of the most cruel imitation; for each instrument was with the most aggravating slowness twisting each of my ivory members round and round, after the style of a screw-driver drawing out a nail.

I was in a state of frenzy—I could bear no more—I must seek, at any rate, some other remedy. Hastily, and wildly, I took up the first garments that came to hand—I don't know, and don't suppose I ever shall, what kind of costume I invented in my hasty toilet that night. My ideas of toilet and costumes were blended into one great need of some kind of covering that would allow of an appearance before Walton the butler. I knew he slept somewhere on the basement, and I had determined on getting to him. Quietly opening my door, I crept stealthily along the dimly-lighted corridors and staircase. I had one dread as I stole along—it was that I might disturb some light sleeper, who, on opening the door to find the cause of the disturbance, and seeing so mysterious-looking an object, would rouse the whole

house by a sudden alarm. My nervous fear of this, and the distracting agony I was enduring, almost led me to see doors opening to the right and left of me, and speechless mortals gazing at me in my unpresentable garb—for I was conscious that it was anything but following the proper order of things. Had Charlie's door opened I certainly must have found wings! But none of these anticipated calamities occurred, for I reached Walton's room without any accident. Knocking most vigorously at the first door I came to, and receiving no answer, I tried the next, with a more satisfactory result, for I heard unmistakable sounds of somebody sleeping within.

"Walton! Walton!" I piteously cried, "get up—I want you."

A smothered, sleepy voice seemed to reply something I did not catch, followed by, "Julia, yes, Julia!" I was in too much suffering to associate this rambling with anything particular; but, in cooler moments, I did recall it and the fact that Julia was the very pretty housemaid, and, doubtless, Walton was enjoying rosy dreams in which Julia was first performer.

I thought of crying "Murder!" and I believe I really did so in a suppressed tone. "Fire!" I know I cried several times, but fortunately the household slept soundly.

"Walton!" I cried louder and louder, and he, now fairly aroused, answered, "Coming, miss, coming—anything wrong—house on fire, miss—somebody ill, did you say?" All this came to me as I was impatiently waiting his appearance, and I the while answering him with, "Be quick—I want you."

"What is it, miss?" came again as Walton opened the door.

"Toothache, Walton!" I said; "and I want a bottle of whiskey." "Toothache! *only* toothache!" I heard him mutter as he passed me.

Only toothache, indeed! Oh that he had had such a night as I had gone through. In my heart of hearts I wished that once upon a time somebody had died of the toothache, and then it would be deemed worthy of more consideration. It seemed hours before he returned with a freshly-opened bottle of whiskey. Taking it from him, I turned hurriedly away, and left him indulging in the idea that I must have lost my senses.

I was now fully awake to the fact that a discovery of me returning to my room would be a worse state of affairs than in the descent from it; but all went well—I reached my room in safety, and, quietly shutting the door, I turned upon my tormentors.

I would *burn* out the warfare, and thereupon ensued a grand and final battle—for I was now armed with a more powerful weapon than before.

Pouring out a quantity of the fiery spirit, in my determination to be strong for the battle, I unthinkingly swallowed it. Gasping for breath was the next consequence; but, on recovering from

that effect, I proceeded to follow up a similar treatment, as I had done earlier in the night with the cold water.

Now I had to undergo another species of torture—the blistering and burning my already over-suffering mouth, till a very furnace seemed created. I did not care—for I meant to be conqueror—and I was. The twisting, excruciating agony I had felt gradually succumbed to the extreme remedy which I had applied outwardly and *inwardly*. A calm, soothing feeling came creeping over me, and gradually I lost all knowledge of tormentors, torture, or treatment. All faded slowly and phantom-like away as a faint stroke of a clock tolled out—one—two—three—four—five—six! Did I exaggerate the truth when I made the entry—“A night of torture?”

When I awoke the whole scene of the night flashed upon me; still, I could hardly realize it as a fact, something that had actually taken place; it so much resembled the unreasonable fancies of a dream: till, sitting up and rubbing my eyes, so as to be able to take a look round, I saw—what!

There, standing in mocking truth, was the half-emptied bottle of whiskey, taunting me with the fact, whether I accepted it or not, that I had gone to sleep intox——. No, I would not utter such an implication against my hitherto unimpeachable self.

True, my blistered and swollen mouth told me that I had used the remedy to burn out the intolerable torture I had endured; but an undesirable remembrance stole upon me that—did not even the clock on the mantelpiece, whose finger pointed to half-past eleven—that I had slept to such a late hour—did it not all tell me that—no, I could not utter the words that now were tormenting me with shame.

And they had let me sleep on—of course, everybody knew all about it!

Doubtless, by this time, Walton had dramatically narrated his knowledge of affairs for the amusement of the servants! Domestic, I had heard, were an unpleasant necessity: and this morning I vainly wished I was a Robinson Crusoe, or a Selkirk, on some enchanted island (with Charlie).

A gentle opening of my door caused me to turn my eyes in its direction, to see Julia's pretty face peeping cautiously in.

“Oh! you are awake, miss; I was told not to disturb you; but Mr. Middleton asked me to look in and see if you were awake and wanted anything. Everybody's out but Mr. Middleton. I think he is waiting for you.” Julia's information was unasked for, but still, quite welcome.

“You can bring me a cup of tea,” I said in reply.

“Nothing to eat, miss?—you must want some breakfast, miss?”

“Servants never can understand why you can't eat,” I said with a sort of disgust—for I was feeling certain Julia would report my

simple want, and what malicious opinion would be passed I was quite too disgusted to imagine. One thing I must do—it was to dress quickly—go down to Charlie, and tell him *all*. I may as well tell you that no sooner had Charlie slipped a shining circlet on my finger a few weeks before this, than I immediately began to turn him into a father confessor, and told him everything: how I had flirted (mildly flirted), perhaps not behaved quite so kindly to so-and-so as I might have done—and much more, which I cannot now mention—and he had laughed or rebuked, as he deemed the narration required.

I daresay it was odd of me to do this—few women would have done so; but Charlie was to be my husband. I knew our engagement was looked upon by each of us as being too sacred to be easily or lightly broken; and I did not, and now don't believe in marriageable happiness if men or women are a kind of locked-up closet to each other; each with a little world past or present to turn into, and which sooner or later must and will produce a coolness between them. *I meant to make Charlie happy*; and one way of doing so was, I knew, to be like an open book to him. He was equally open and trusting with me; and this was the foundation we began to make for future years of happiness.

So far telling Charlie *everything* had been easy and pleasant work; but this morning I felt a kind of shame connected with it, and I rather shrank from it as a disagreeable duty.

I had hardly patience to see my snowy teeth, that were looking as if they were the very best behaved, and I think I vowed a vow that if ever they played me such pranks, I would—yes, I would, without hesitation (undergo administration of chloroform—I was too great a coward without) have every one of them extracted, and replaced by artificial ones. Whether this threat had any effect in subduing their frequent irritability, I don't know; but from that time I have never been tortured again.

My agony seemed endless, for Charlie must know all, and now I had to face out what I had to tell him, that the woman he was going to make his wife could, and had—again I could not, dare not, find words to express my thoughts and the facts. He had such a high ideal standard for women. How might he take this? Perhaps as the beginning of a bad ending.

But why torment myself further? I must take a glance at my appearance and join him.

I did feel particularly anxious to be looking my best. It is no use to deny that we women get through any difficulty better for feeling that we are looking our best. Somehow, it gives us ease and confidence, and is like an unknown power helping us on to victory. The glance I took produced a satisfactory result, my face on one side was swollen, but so little as to be unnoticeable unless it was known. I had dark rims under my eyes, but the eyes were

bright enough. Certainly my usual colour had fled, but the paleness was becoming, and I saw I was looking decidedly invalidish, which would arouse all Charlie's pity; pity from any one else I should have scorned, but *he* was so different from everybody else. Reaching the drawing-room door, I hesitated a moment, and, as I did so, the door opened and he stood before me.

I need not go over the lover's exclamations of concern and endearments, nor how quickly I found myself comfortably settled on a couch, with the softest pillow for my pale face to rest upon; but I must tell you something about Charlie's style of love-making. It was of a most erratic character; for sometimes he would treat me as a spoilt child, pet me, stroke my hair down, and I have even known him to bend down and press his lips to my wavy brown hair, as if even *that* was precious to him. *Bend* down, I say, because I am a little woman, and he towers above me.

It was pleasant to be petted and loved, but what I called his serious love-making was far the dearest to me. It made me rise superior to being only a doll for my husband to dress well, exhibit, and then get tired of. It made me feel I was the *wife*, the *helpmeet*, to whom and at all times he would come to take the *woman's* keen perception and loving thought to mould his schemes and actions.

But this morning I desired of all things that I should find him in his most foolish love-making mood; but fortune had decidedly turned against me, for there sat Charlie before me provokingly serious. He had drawn a chair to the front of my couch, and, with his elbows resting on his knees, his face resting on his hands, he sat and gazed into my face with all the power of his serious, love-making eyes. If only he had the fancy to admire my hair instead of my eyes.

I felt inclined to invent some means of diverting his attention to my soft tresses, *anything* to get him where he would not be looking so intently into my face. But it was useless. His intention was to sit there and look at me. And he always is the essence of perverseness if he cannot see a very good cause for yielding his will to another. After all, I need not have congratulated myself on looking so interestingly invalidish, if this was the result of it. How very quiet we were, till I began a conversation by saying: "Why did you not join the others?"

"Rather a strange question, Nelly," he said, "because you know *why*."

"I am so sorry I have spoilt your day's pleasure," I meekly replied.

"The pleasure is postponed till to-morrow, on your account," he followed up.

"Oh, dear, dear!" I pettishly interrupted, "I suppose you know all about my night's doings, and it has gone the round of the house."

"Night's doings, dear? I don't know exactly what you mean—I heard you were not well, and an order had been given that you were not to be disturbed; and your pale face, my child, tells its own tale."

"Oh! Charlie!" I said, my eyes filling with tears—for I felt weak and worn out—"I have had an *awful* night!" And then I plunged into my story and told him *all*.

During my narrative I stole cursory glances at his face, to see how he was taking it; once I thought I could detect a mischievous laughing expression, but on the whole, it was a sympathizing face I saw looking into mine.

He was a silent listener until I got to that portion of my story when Walton appeared on the scene. Then he broke into a hearty laugh. This rather reassured me, for I was telling my woes in a rapid manner, while I nervously played with the ring on my finger—the bond that outwardly held us together.

My tale was told, and now I waited to hear what he would say.

"Nelly," a solemn voice began, "you must have gone to sleep in——"

"Don't, don't!" I said, raising my hands in a beseeching manner, "don't, Charlie—I am a woman—a *lady*—oh! don't."

"But, Nelly——"

Here I stole another cursory glance at his face, so solemnly serious it looked. Now, had I taken *more* than a cursory glance, I might have discovered a mischievous twinkle in the apparently serious-looking eyes; but all that I saw was a solemnity stealing over his face, and as he stroked his beard I felt he contemplated something, it could be but *one* thing. So, as he began, "But, Nelly——" I stopped him: better I said it, so, quickly raising myself from the couch to a sitting position, in an instant the glittering circle was off my finger, as I nervously and hurriedly accompanied the action with:

"Of course, Charlie, you need not marry me; but don't say any more; I always felt I was not to marry, and this comes of taking fate in my own hands."

What a picture that scene would have made! It stands out vividly before me. In a mirror facing me I could see my own white face and large bright eyes, and Charlie sitting there with a thunder-cloud on his, and the diamond-jewelled ring resting on his knee, where I had laid it.

His face was a study, a commingling of anger and grief, as he sternly said:

"Nelly—take back that ring—I shall not touch it."

The tone in the voice, the look in the face, came to me as a royal demand ere I dared rebel.

My life had been one of doing my *own* will, but here I felt the master mind, and obediently and submissively I took up my

precious ring and coyly slipped it on my finger ; my eyes followed it, and rested there, for I could not look up.

Presently a hand was laid lovingly on mine, and a voice out of which all sternness was gone spoke :

"Nelly, I did not wait for thirty years before I found the woman I could ask to be my wife, and then to find she could so quickly and so easily wish to break the promise she gave me—a promise I took for a vow, as serious and as binding as a marriage ceremony. The love I sought was not to be given to-day and taken back to-morrow—Nelly ! Nelly !"

Then I lifted up a tear-stained face—I know tears ran down my cheeks—and Charlie took me in his arms, kissed my hair, my face, and—and I *was happy* !

"Charlie," I said as I nestled against him, "you don't really think that I was—was——"

He laughed at me—yes, he did laugh, and said :

"Suppose we say it was '*intoxicated toothache* !' and now forget all about it."

Time sped happily and too quickly away, when voices in the hall told us that we were not in an uninhabited land.

I hurriedly slipped from Charlie's caresses to make my way upstairs, while he carelessly sauntered away, humming a song as if nothing had happened. How cool some men are ! Charlie's non-chalance would suggest that he had been quietly reading a book ; but I—for the life of me I could not have looked as if I had been reading ; my rosy cheeks and ruffled hair would not be likely to suggest that Charlie and I had been sitting in opposite corners of the room !

When I descended again I was met with sympathy from all. Charlie had told my tale, as he thought, well, and so helped me out of my dilemma ; and the last days at Arden Lodge were the pleasantest of all.

This was the meaning of the strange, and what for the moment seemed, an unexplainable memorandum.

The little book lay in my lap—it might be a musical-box that had just played a pretty selection of tunes, and only waited for the spring to be touched again that it might give me another melody of bygone times.

I took it up and turned over the leaves, wondering what next would catch my eye.

What other stories it might tell were resigned to the future, for a sound had stolen upon my ear—a sound of a shrill whistle. Ah ! well I knew its meaning.

My lord and master was asking for me in his own peculiar language, well understood between us. Chest and package with their treasures, or rubbish, as the case might be, must be shut up. The turning-out business would have to be left till another day—for, as this whistle rose and fell, I knew that the rooms were being

searched for me. My husband would tell me over and over again, if he returned, and I was not visible, that the dining-room looked depressingly dull; that the drawing-room was of no use without its mistress, and even the study wanted a something. Could I be anything else than a happy wife when *everything wanted me*?

Was ever wife happier than I—any husband than he? Yet we have not had a cloudless sky. Had it been—surely heaven had come down to earth, or earth called up to heaven!

There is a tiny grave that could say something. My joy—his pride—was taken one summer's day; and in the mother's loss I grew selfish, and almost forgot the love I bore my husband—forgot *his* sorrow.

Say not men cannot be tender—cannot fill up any gap that may open to the wife!

His own sorrow was lost in my suffering, and as this broke upon me I turned to comfort him, and our love grew deeper and more beautiful.

Charlie and I often wend our way to stand beside the well-kept tiny grave, where the roses bloom and sweet flowers make a halo of radiance around it—work all done by our own hands. And as we turn our steps towards our home, and the silent resting place is left behind, and the voices and din of life break upon our ears, we feel our little one's grave is as a finger-post pointing us from earth to heaven!

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

THE "social echoes" are this month in the minor key. Who could fail to be saddened by the drama of suffering so courageously borne by the illustrious patient who is the husband of our Queen's eldest daughter? That his illness should have been protracted by the jealousy and ill-feeling of German doctors, and his nerves harassed by the impracticable character of his eldest son, are circumstances that every right-minded person regards with indignation as well as sympathetic feeling. The famous *cannula* that Sir Morell Mackenzie made with his own hands in the jeweller's shop in San Remo, will live immortally in medical records, while the bigoted cruelty of the German doctors, who actually insisted on replacing the thick and unwieldy tube which had caused so much pain, loss of blood and so many sleepless nights, will share the immortality in an unenviable manner. How often must the Crown Princess have wished that her husband had been one of the multitude enjoying the common privilege of at least selecting his own medical man. How terrible for her to watch her beloved patient through those long and weary nights of constant coughing, through those days of pain and discomfort, and to *know* that effectual help was at hand but that it must not be used. I can imagine no greater torture than hers must have been, knowing, as she did, that the English doctors held the clue to comparative health and ease, and aware that her husband knew it too, and yet to be obliged to watch his failing strength day after day and know that his case was being utterly mismanaged.

Is it any wonder that there was a paroxysm of despair, of uncontrolled agony on the part of the desperate wife? We women know what it is to watch the illness of some dear one even under the most favourable circumstances, when we have the attendance of our own trusted doctor and can use every means that occurs to us to assuage and alleviate the sufferings that touch us to the heart. And even then, how terrible is the tension, how acute the agony of sympathy and the pain of pity! What a terrible aggravation of sorrow it would be to see all going wrong, owing to a cause, removable in itself, but which was quite beyond our own control. I do not think I ever read of any case, whether in fact or in fiction, so incontestably calculated to command the truest sympathy.

The silver wedding of our Prince and Princess of Wales, shorn of its principal festivities and celebrated in shadow as it were, owing to the condition of the German Emperor, by no means failed of abundant recognition from the most valued source, the hearts of the people. Our genial Prince is well known to be the most popular "royalty" in Europe; and history may be challenged to produce a case parallel to that of the Princess of Wales, who, coming as a foreigner to England, immediately won all hearts and has kept them during all these twenty-five years. It was most unfortunate that an occasion so interesting should have been shrouded in the gloom consequent upon the death of the late German Emperor, which occurred on the previous day. Poetic fancy had delighted in devising appropriate emblems for it.

Mrs. Green's bouquets, even, were touched with silver in the shape of natural ivy leaves, frosted over and glittering with an agglomeration of silvery particles. One of her loveliest bouquets was composed of lilies of the valley, violets dark and light, and these ivy leaves. Another, composed of arum lilies, was a beautiful melody in tones of white, from the silvered foliage down to the deep warm cream-colour in the heart of the lily leaves. Lady Morell Mackenzie was to have carried a posy of white lilac and silver wheat-ears, and Madame Catalani's Guelder roses and frosted leaves was another triumph of the florist's art.

The production of "Little Lord Fauntleroy," by a Mr. Seebohm, in defiance of Mrs. Burnett's refusal to sanction his dramatic version of her play, has raised such a storm of disapproval that the occurrence is by no means unlikely to lead to some practical decision on the subject of the rights of authors to the dramatic copyright of their own works. That such an injustice as was perpetrated in this instance should have been possible under existing laws, is perhaps less surprising than that any one should be found so lost to all sense of honour as to avail himself of the fact. It is satisfactory to find, however, that Mr. Seebohm has not only received liberal blame generally at the hands and pens of the press, but that the unanimous verdict is to the effect that all that is good in the play is Mrs. Burnett's, and all that is bad, Mr. Seebohm's. The success of the play was largely owing to the beauty of Miss Annie Hughes' impersonation of Little Lord Fauntleroy, and the charm of Mrs. Burnett's dialogue.

"The Power of Love," produced at a *matinée* at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, cannot be called a satisfactory play. It is a dramatic version of Mrs. Panton's novel, "A Tangled Skein," and with regard to the failure of poetic justice in the conclusion of the play, the authoress writes to a daily paper, explaining that a very different end overtakes the guilty heroine of the book. The performance served to display the clever acting of Miss Annie Rose in an extremely difficult part, and showed Miss Maud Millett to great advantage as impersonating a charmingly fresh, sweet

English maiden. Mr. Nutcombe Gould was the best of the male actors. He will be heard of again.

"The Mystery of a Hansom Cab" is a great success at the Princess's Theatre, now under the management of a fascinating little American lady, Miss Grace Hawthorne. The critics condemned the play as faulty in construction, but the public is crowding to see the "mystery" elucidated. Human nature is always attracted by the mysterious element, and those who have read the book, equally with those who have not, are curious as to how the puzzle is worked out on the boards.

Mrs. Bernard-Beere is going to play "Ariane" right through the London season. The play is a tremendous "draw." That it is to be burlesqued by Mr. Burnand is but an additional proof of its popularity. In "Christina," at the Olympic, Miss Alma Murray gives us one of her most refined impersonations, and Mr. Willard a very perfect villain. The play itself is one of very great interest, and no one who really enjoys "a good cry" ought to miss seeing it. At the Strand Miss Alice Atherton elicits much wholesome merriment in her part of Katti, the German servant, who describes herself so deliciously: "I can recommend meinsel. I vas a goot servant. I don't make meinsel inquisitiveness. I spoke English so good you don't can told I vas German on my talk. Meinherr Fluffy will give a goot character off me."

"Fascination," at the Vaudeville, has been replaced by Mr. Robert Buchanan's play, "Joseph's Sweetheart," a pathetic story full of interest of a picturesque era. This new adaptation of Fielding promises to be as great a success as "Sophia" herself. Parson Adams gives Mr. Thomas Thorne the opportunity for one of those tender and humorous parts in which no one on the stage can approach him. He is one of the few who can make his audience thoroughly forget the actor in the character he is playing. It is delightful to "suffer illusion" of this kind; for, though it is, or should be, the aim of every actor to sink his personality in his part, but very, very few succeed in doing so, or even appear to desire it.

Among coming events is the opening of the Novelty with "Nita's First," by the popular Mr. Giddens; Miss Genevieve Ward's week at the Lyceum, when she will play, probably for the last time, her famous part in "Forget-Me-Not" and "Nance Oldfield," in addition to producing a new play. Easter week will be a busy one for this energetic lady.

"Sweet Lavender" is the pretty name of Mr. Pinero's new play at Terry's Theatre. We, who love the theatre, have prospect of abundant variety and amusement during the next few months; and though society is at the present moment by no means cheerful, and our court in deepest mourning, in a few weeks a very great change to brightness will probably be apparent, and the season may, after all, be a cheery and successful one.

LONDON SOCIETY.

MAY, 1888.

THE FATAL THREE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIKEN," "ISHMAEL," "LIKE AND UNLIKE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER X.—(*continued*).

NOTHING could be more strongly marked than the contrast between the two men as they stood facing each other in the golden light of afternoon. Greswold, tall, broad-shouldered, rugged-looking in his rough brown heather suit and deerstalking cap, carrying a thick stick, with an iron fork at the end of it, for the annihilation of chance weeds in his peregrinations. His fine and massive features had a worn look, his cheeks were hollow, his dark hair and beard were grizzled here and there, his dark complexion had lost the hue of youth. He looked ten years older than his actual age.

Before him stood the Italian, graceful, gracious in every line and every movement; his features delicately chiselled, his eyes dark, full and bright; his complexion of that milky pallor which is so often seen with hair tending towards red, his brown beard of silkiest texture, his hands delicately modelled and of ivory whiteness, his dress imbued with all the grace which a fashionable tailor can give to the clothes of a man who cultivates the beautiful even in the barren field of nineteenth-century costume. It was impossible that so marked a contrast could escape Mildred's observation altogether; yet she perceived it dimly. The picture came back to her memory afterwards in more vivid colours.

She made the necessary introduction, and then proceeded to pour out the tea, leaving the two men to talk to each other.

"Your name has an Italian sound," Greswold said presently.

"It is a Milanese name. My father was a native of Milan. My mother was French, but she was educated in England, and all her proclivities were English. It was at her desire my father sent me to Rugby, and afterwards to Cambridge. Her fatal illness

called me back to Italy immediately after I had got my degree, and it was some years before I again visited England."

"Were you in Italy all that time?" asked Greswold, looking down absently and with an unwonted trouble in his face.

Mildred sat at the tea table, the visitor waiting upon her, insisting upon charging himself with her husband's cup as well as his own, an attention and reversal of etiquette of which Mr. Greswold seemed unconscious. Cassandra had returned with her master from a long walk, and was lying at his feet in elderly exhaustion. She saluted the stranger with a suppressed growl when he approached with the tea cups. Cassandra adored her own people, but was not remarkable for civility to strangers.

"Yes, I wasted four or five years in the South—in Florence, in Venice, or along the Riviera, wandering about like Satan, not having made up my mind what to do in the world."

Greswold was silent, bending down to play with Cassandra, who wagged her tail with a gentle largo movement, in grateful contentment.

"You must have heard my father's name when you were at Milan," said Castellani. "His music was fashionable *there*."

Mildred looked up with a surprised expression. She had never heard her husband talk of Milan, and yet this stranger mentioned his residence there as if it were an established fact.

"How did you know I was ever at Milan?" asked Greswold, looking up sharply.

"For the simplest of reasons. I had the honour of meeting you on more than one occasion at large assemblies, where my insignificant personality would hardly impress itself upon your memory. And I met you a year later at Lady Lochinvar's palace at Nice, soon after your first marriage."

Mildred looked up at her husband. He was pale as ashes, his lips whitening as she gazed at him. She felt her own cheeks paling; felt a sudden coldness creeping over her, as if she were going to faint. She watched her husband dumbly, expecting him to tell this man that he was mistaken, that he was confounding him, George Greswold, with some one else; but Greswold sat silent, and presently, as if to hide his confusion, bent again over the dog, who got up suddenly and licked his face in a gush of affection—as if she knew—as if she knew!

He had been married before, and he had told his wife not one word of that first marriage. There had been no hint of the fact that he was a widower when he asked John Fausset for his daughter's hand.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEGINNING OF DOUBT.

ENDERBY Church clock struck six. They heard every chime, slow and clear in the summer air, as they sat in the broad shadow of the cedar, silent all three.

It seemed as if the striking of the clock were the breaking of a spell.

"So late?" exclaimed Castellani, in a cheery voice; "and I promised Mrs. Hillersdon to be back in time to drive to Romsey for the evening service. The old Abbey Church of Romsey, she tells me, is a thing to dream about. There is no eight o'clock dinner at Riverdale on Sundays. Every one goes to church somewhere, and we sup at half-past nine, and after supper there is sometimes extempore prayer—and sometimes there are charades or dumb crambo. *C'est selon*. When the Prince was there they had dumb crambo. Good-bye. I am almost ashamed to ask if I may ever come again, after having burdened you for such an unconscionable time."

He had the easiest air possible, and seemed totally unconscious of any embarrassment caused by his allusions to the past; and yet in both faces, as he looked from one to the other, he must have seen the strongest indications of trouble.

Mrs. Greswold murmured something to the effect that she would be glad to see him at any time, a speech obviously conventional and unmeaning. Mr. Greswold rose hastily and accompanied him to the hall door, where the cart still waited for him, the groom fixed as a statue of despondency.

Mr. Castellani was inclined to be loquacious to the last. Greswold was brief almost to incivility. He stood watching the light cart roll away, and then went slowly back to the garden and to his seat under the cedar.

He seated himself there in silence, looking earnestly at his wife, whose drooping head and fixed attitude told of deepest thought. So they sat for some minutes in dead silence, Kassandra licking her master's pendant hand, as he leaned forward with his elbow on his knee, infinitely sorry for him.

Mildred was the first to break that silence.

"George, why did you not tell me," she began in a low faltering voice, "that I was not your first wife? What reason could there be for concealment between you and me? I so trusted you, I so loved you. Nothing you could have told would have changed me.

"Dearest, there was one reason, and a powerful one," answered George Greswold firmly, meeting the appealing look of her eyes with a clear and steady gaze. "My first marriage is a sad re-

membrance for me, full of trouble. I did not care to tell you that miserable story, to call a dreaded ghost out of the grave of the past. My first marriage was the one great sorrow of my life, but it was only an episode in my life. It left me as lonely as it found me. There are very few who know anything about it. I am sorry that young man should have come here to trouble us with his unnecessary reminiscences. For my own part, I cannot remember having ever seen his face before."

"I am sorry you should have kept such a secret from me," said Mildred. "It would have been so much wiser to have been candid. Do you think I should not have respected your sad remembrances? You had only to say to me, 'Such things were, but let us not talk of them.' It would have been more manly—it would have been kinder to me."

"Say that I was a coward, if you like—that I am still a coward, where those memories are concerned," said Greswold.

The look of agony in his face melted her in a moment. She threw herself on her knees beside his chair, she and the dog fawning upon him together.

"Forgive me, forgive me, dearest," she pleaded; "I will never speak to you of this again. Women are so jealous—of the past most of all."

"Is that all?" he said; "God knows you have little need. Let us say no more, Mildred. The past is past, neither you nor I can alter it. Memory is inexorable. God himself cannot change it."

"I will contrive that Mr. Castellani shall not come here again, George, if you object to see him."

"Pray, don't trouble yourself. I would not have such a worm suppose that he could be obnoxious to me."

"Tell me what you think of him," she asked in a lighter tone, anxious to bring back the easy mood of every-day life. "He seems very clever, and he is rather handsome."

"What do I think of the trumpet ash on the verandah yonder? A beautiful parasite, which will hold on anywhere in the sunshine. Mr. Castellani is of the same family I take it—studies his own interests first, and chooses his friends afterwards. He will do admirably for Riverdale."

"He plays divinely. His touch transformed my piano."

"He looks the kind of man who would play the piano," said Greswold with ineffable contempt, looking down at his own sun-burnt hands, hardened by exposure to all weathers, broadened by handling gun and punt-pole, and by half-a-dozen other forms of out-door exercise. "However, I have no objection to him, if he serves to amuse you and Pamela."

He spoke with a kind of weary indifference, as of a man who cared for very little in life; and then he rose slowly, took up his stick, and strolled off to the shrubbery.

Pamela appeared on the following afternoon with boxes, bags, music books, racquets and parasols, in a proportion which gave promise of a long visit. She had asked as a tremendous favour to be allowed to bring Box—otherwise Fitz-Box—her fox terrier, son of Sir Henry Mountford's Box, great grandson of Brockenhurst Joe, by that distinguished animal's daughter, Lyndhurst Jessie, and on the father's side a lineal descendant of Mr. Murchison's Cracknel.

"I hope you won't mind very much," she wrote; "but it would be death to him if I were to leave him behind. To begin with, his brother Fitz-Cox, who has a villainous temper, would inevitably kill him; and besides that he would pine to death at not sleeping in my room at night, which he has done ever since he was a puppy. If you will let me bring him, I will answer for his good manners, and that he shall not be a trouble to any one."

The descendant of Brockenhurst Joe rushed out into the garden, and made a lightning circuit of lawn and shrubberies, while his young mistress was kissing her Aunt Mildred, as she called her uncle's wife in the fulness of her affection.

"It is so very good of you to have me, and I am so delighted to come!" she said.

Mildred would have much preferred that she were anywhere else, yet could not help feeling kindly to her. She was a frank, bright-looking girl, with brown eyes and almost flaxen hair, a piquant contrast, for the hair was genuine, and carried out in the eyebrows, which were only just a shade darker. Her complexion was fair to transparency, and she had just enough soft rosy bloom to light up the delicate skin. Her nose was slightly *retroussé*, her mouth was a little wider than she herself approved, but her teeth were perfection. She had a charming figure of the plump order, but its plumpness was a distress to her.

"Don't you think I get horribly stout?" she asked Mildred, when she was sitting at tea in the garden presently.

"You may be a little stouter than you were at sixteen, perhaps, but not at all too stout."

"Oh, but I am. I know it, I feel it. Don't endeavour to spare my feelings, aunt. It is useless. I know I am fat. Rosalind says I ought to marry; but I tell her it's absurd. How can anybody ever care for me, now I am fat? They would only want my money if they asked me to marry them," concluded Pamela, clinging to the plural.

"My dear Pamela, do you want me to tell you that you are charming and all that you ought to be?" asked Mildred, laughing.

"Oh, no, no, I don't want you to spare my feelings. Everybody spares one's feelings. One grows up in ignorance of the horrors in one's appearance because people *will* spare one's feel-

ings. And then one sees oneself in a strange glass—or a boy in the street says something, and one knows the worst. I think I know the worst about myself. That is one comfort. How lovely it is here," said Pamela, with a sudden change of mood, glancing at Mildred with a little pathetic look, as she remembered the childish figure that was missing, must be for ever missing, from that home picture. "I am so glad to be with you," she murmured softly, nestling up to Mildred's side, as they sat together on a rustic bench; "let me be useful to you, let me be a companion to you, if you can."

"You shall be both, dear."

"How good to say that. And you won't mind Box?"

"Not the least—if he will be amiable to Kassandra."

"He will. He has been brought up among other dogs. We are a very doggy family at the Hall. Would you think he was worth a hundred and fifty guineas?" asked Pamela with ill-concealed pride, as the scion of illustrious progenitors came up and put his long lean head in her hand, and conversed with her in a series of expressive snorts, as it were a conversational code.

"I hardly know what constitutes perfection in a fox terrier."

"No more do I; but I know he is perfect. He is said to be the image of Cracknel, only better. I tremble when I think that my possession of him hangs by a thread. He might be stolen at any moment."

"You must be careful."

"Yes, I cannot be too careful. Here comes Uncle George," said Pamela, rising and running to meet Mr. Greswold. "Oh, Uncle George, *how* altered you are!"

She was always saying the wrong thing, after the manner of impulsive girls; and she was quick-witted enough to discover her mistake the instant after.

Happily the dogs furnished a ready diversion. She introduced Box, and expatiated upon his grand qualities. She admired and made friends with Kassandra, and then settled down almost as lightly as a butterfly, in spite of her plumpness, on a Japanese stool, to take her teacup from Mildred's hands.

She was perfectly at her ease by this time, and told her uncle and aunt all about her sister Rosalind, and Rosalind's husband, Sir Henry Mountford, whom she summed up lightly as a nice old thing, and no end of fun. It was easy to divine from her discourse that Rainham Hall was not an especially intellectual atmosphere, not a school of advanced thought, or of any other kind of thought. Pamela's talk was of tennis, yachting, fishing and shooting, and of the people who shared in those sports. She seemed to belong to a world in which nobody ever sat down except to eat, or stayed indoors except under stress of weather.

"I hear you have all manner of clever people in your neighbourhood," she said by-and-by, having told all she had to tell about Rainham.

"Have we?" asked Greswold, smiling at her intensity.

"Yes, at Riverdale. They do say the author of 'Nepenthe' is staying there—and that he is not a Roman cardinal—or an English statesman—but almost a young man—an Italian by birth—and *very* handsome. I would give worlds to see him."

"It is not unlikely you may be gratified without giving anything," answered her uncle. "Mr. Castellani was here yesterday afternoon, and threatened to repeat his visit."

"Castellani! Yes, that is the name I heard. What a pretty name! And what is he like? Do tell me all about him, Aunt Mildred."

She turned to the woman as the more likely to give her a graphic description. The average man is an undescribing animal.

Mildred made an effort at self-command before she spoke. Castellani counted for but little in her recent trouble. His revelation had been an accident, and its effect entirely dissociated from him. Yet the very thought of the man troubled her, and the dread of seeing him again was like a physical pain.

"I do not know what to say about his appearance," she answered presently, slowly fanning herself with a great scarlet Japanese fan, pale and cool looking in her plain white gown with its black ribbons. The very picture of domestic peace, one would suppose, judging by externals only. "I suppose there are people who would think him handsome."

"Don't you, aunt?"

"No. I don't like the colour of his eyes or of his hair. They are of that reddish brown which the Venetian painters are so fond of, but which always gives me an idea of falsehood and treachery. Mr. Castellani is a very clever man, but he is not a man whom I could ever trust."

"How nice," cried Pamela, her face radiant with enthusiasm; "a creature with red-brown hair, and eyes with a depth of falsehood in them. That is just the kind of man who might be the author of 'Nepenthe.' If you had told me he was stout and rosy-cheeked, with pepper and salt whiskers and a fine, benevolent head, I would never have opened his book again."

"You seem to admire this 'Nepenthe' prodigiously," said her uncle, looking at her with a calmly critical air. "Is it because the book is the fashion, or from your own unassisted appreciation of it? I did not think you were a bookish person."

"I'm not," cried Pamela. "I am a mass of ignorance. I don't know anything about science. I don't know the name of a single butterfly. I don't know one toad-stool from another. But when I love a book it is a passion with me. My Keats has tumbled to pieces. My Shelley is disgracefully dirty. I have read 'Nepenthe' six times, and I am waiting for the cheap edition, to keep it under my pillow. It has made me an agnostic."

"Do you know the dictionary meaning of that word?"

"I don't think I do, but I know I am an agnostic. 'Nepenthe' has unsettled all my old beliefs. If I had read it four years ago I should have refused to be confirmed. I am dying to know the author."

"You like unbelievers, then?"

"I adore men who dare to doubt, who are not afraid to stand apart from their fellow men."

"On a bad eminence?"

"Yes, on a bad eminence. What a sweet expression. I can never understand Goethe's Gretchen."

"Why not?"

"How could she have cared for Faust, when she had the privilege of knowing Mephistopheles?"

Pamela Ransome had established herself in her pretty bedroom and dressing-room, and had supervised her maid while she unpacked and arranged all her belongings before dinner time. She came down to the drawing-room at a quarter to eight as thoroughly at her ease as if she had lived half her life at Enderby Manor. She was the kind of visitor who gives no trouble, and who drops into the right place instinctively. Mildred Greswold felt cheered by her presence in spite of that bitter and ever recurrent pang of memory which brought back that other image of the sweet girl-child who should have grown to womanhood under that roof, and who was lying a little way off, under the ripening berries of the mountain ash, and in the deep shadow of a century-old yew.

They were very quiet in the drawing-room after dinner, Greswold reading in a nook apart, by the light of his own particular lamp; his wife bending over an embroidery frame in her corner near the piano, where she had her own special dwarf book-case, and her work-basket, and the *bonheur du jour*, at which she sometimes wrote letters, her own little table scattered with old-family miniatures by Angelica Kaufmann, Cosway and Ross—and antique watches in enamelled cases, and boxes of porcelain and gold and silver, every one of which had its associations and its history. Every woman who lives much at home has some such corner, where the very atmosphere is full of home-thoughts. She asked her niece to play, and to go on playing as long as she liked; and Pamela, pleased with the touch of the fine concert grand, rang the changes upon Chopin, Schumann, Raff and Brahms, choosing those compositions which least jarred upon the atmosphere of studious repose.

Mildred's needle moved slowly, as she sat in her low chair, with her hands in the lamp light and her face in shadow, moved very slowly, and then stopped altogether, and the white hands lay idle in her lap, and the embroidery frame, with its half-finished group of azaleas, slid from her knee to the ground. She was thinking—thinking of that one subject which had possessed her thoughts since yesterday afternoon; which had kept her awake through

the brief darkness of the summer night, and in the slow hours betwixt dawn and the entrance of the maid with the early cup of tea which marked the beginning of the daily routine. In all those hours her thoughts had revolved round that one theme with an intolerable recurrence.

It was of her husband's first marriage she thought, and of his motive for silence about that marriage. That he who, in the whole course of their wedded lives, had been the very spirit of single-minded candour, should yet have suppressed this all-important event in his past history was a fact in itself so startling and mysterious that it might well be the focus of a wife's troubled thoughts. He could not so have acted without some all-sufficient reason; and what manner of reason could that have been which had influenced him to conduct so entirely at variance with his own character?

"I know that he is truthful, high-minded, the soul of honour," she told herself, "and yet there is a tacit falsehood in such a course as he has taken which seems hardly compatible with honour."

What was there in the history of that marriage which had sealed his lips, which made it horrible to him to speak about it, even when fair dealing with the girl who was to be his wife should have constrained frankness?

Had he been cursed with a wicked wife—some beautiful creature who had caught his heart in her toils as a cat catches a bird, and had won him only to betray and to dishonour him? Had she blighted his life, branded him with the shame of a forsaken husband?

And then a hideous dread floated across her mind. What if that first wife were still living—divorced from him! Had she, Mildred Fausset, severely trained in the strictest principles of the Anglican Church—taught her creed by an ascetic who deemed divorce unchristian and an abomination, and who had always refused to marry those who had been divorced—had she, in whose life and mind religion and duty were as one feeling and one principle, had she been trapped into a union with a man whose wife yet lived, and in the sight of God was yet one with him—a wife who might crawl penitent to his feet some day, and claim him as her own again by the right of tears and prayers and a soul cleansed from sin? Such a sinner must have some hold, some claim even to the last upon the man who once was her husband, who once swore to cherish her and cleave to her—of whom it had once been said, "And they two shall be one flesh."

No, again and again no. She could not believe George Greswold capable of such deep dishonour as to have concealed the existence of a divorced wife. No, the reason for that mysterious silence must be another reason than this.

She had sinned against him it might be, and had died in her sin, under circumstances too sad to be told without infinite pain;

and he, who had never in her experience shown himself wanting in moral courage, had in this one crisis of his life acted as the coward acts. He had kept silence where conscience should have constrained him to speak.

And then the wife's vivid fancy conjured up the image of that other wife. Jealous love for the husband depicted that wife of past years as a being to be loved and remembered until death; beautiful, fascinating, gifted with all the qualities that charm mankind, the superior of the second wife. That poor, jealous heart ached with a sick longing to know the worst. "He can never care for me as he once cared for her," Mildred told herself. "She was his first love."

His first; the first revelation of what love means to the passionate heart of youth. What a world there is in that. Mildred remembered how a new life began for her with the awakening of her love for George Greswold. What a strange, sweet enchantment, what an intoxicating gladness which changed and glorified the whole face of nature. The river, and the reedy islets, and the pollard willows, and the autumn sunset—things so simple and familiar had all taken new colours in that magical dawn of her first love.

She—that unknown woman—had been George Greswold's first love. Mildred envied her that brief life, whose sole distinction was to have been loved by him.

"Why do I imagine a mystery about her?" she argued, after long brooding. "The only secret was that he had loved her as he could never love me, and he feared to tell me as much lest I should refuse the remnant of a heart. It was out of kindness to me that he kept silence. It would have pained me too much to know how *she* had been loved."

She knew that her husband was a man of exceeding sensitiveness; she knew him capable of almost womanlike delicacy, intense fear of wounding other people's feelings. Was it altogether unnatural that such a man should have held back the history of his first marriage, with its passionate love, its heart-broken ending, from the enthusiastic girl who had given him all her heart, and to whom he could give so little in return?

"He may have seen how I adored him, and may have married me half out of pity," she said to herself finally, with unspeakable bitterness.

Yet if this were so could they have been so happy together, so completely united—save in that one secret of the past, that one dark regret which had revealed itself from time to time in an agonizing dream? He had walked that dark labyrinth of sleep alone with his sorrow: there she could not follow him.

She remembered the awful sound of those broken sentences—spoken to shadows in a land of shadow. She remembered how acutely she had felt his remoteness as he sat up in bed, pale as

death, his eyes open and fixed, his lips muttering. He and the dead were face to face in the halls of the past. *She* had no part in his life, or in his memory.

CHAPTER XII.

"SHE CANNOT BE UNWORTHY."

MR. CASTELLANI did not wait long before he availed himself of Mrs. Greswold's permission to repeat his visit. He appeared on Friday afternoon, at the orthodox hour of half-past three, when Mildred and her niece were sitting in the drawing-room, exhausted by a long morning at Salisbury, where they had explored the cathedral, and lunched in the Close with a clever friend of George Greswold's, who had made his mark on modern literature.

"I adore Salisbury Close," said Pamela, as she looked through the old-fashioned window to the old-fashioned garden, "it reminds me of Honoria." She did not deem it necessary to explain what Honoria she meant, presuming a universal acquaintance with Coventry Patmore's gentle heroine.

The morning had been sultry, the homeward drive long, and both ladies were resting in comfortable silence, each with a book, when Mr. Castellani was announced.

Mildred received him rather stiffly, trying her uttermost to seem thoroughly at ease. She introduced him to her niece, Miss Ransome.

"The daughter of the late Mr. Gilbert Ransome, and the sister of Lady Mountford?" Castellani inquired presently, when Pamela had run out on the lawn to speak to Box.

"Yes. You seem to know everybody's belongings."

"Why not? It is the duty of every man of the world, more especially of a foreigner. I know Mr. Ransome's place in the Sussex Weald—a very fine property, and I know that the two ladies are co-heiresses, but that the Sussex estate is to descend to the eldest son of the elder daughter, or failing male issue there, to the son of the younger. Lady Mountford has a baby son, I believe."

"Your information is altogether correct."

"Why should it be otherwise? Mr. Hillersdon and his wife discussed the family history to-day at luncheon, apropos to Miss Ransome's appearance in Romsey Church at the Saints' Day service yesterday."

His frankness apologized for his impertinence, and he was a foreigner, which seems always to excuse a great deal.

Pamela came back again, after rescuing Box from a rough-and-tumble game with Kassandra. She looked rosy and breathless and very pretty, in her pale-blue gown and girlish sash flying in

the wind, and flaxen hair fluffed into a feathery pile on the top of her head, and honest brown eyes. She resumed her seat in the deep old window behind the end of the piano, and made believe to go on with some work, which she took in a tangled heap from a very untidy basket. Already Pamela had set the sign of her presence upon the drawing-rooms at Enderby, a trail of various litter which was a part of her individuality. Screened by the piano, she was able to observe Castellani, as he stood leaning over the large central ottoman, with his knee on the cushioned seat, talking to Mrs. Greswold.

He was the author of "*Nepenthe*." It was in that character he interested her. She looked at him with the thought of his book full in her mind. It was one of those half mad, wholly artificial compositions which delight girls and young men, and which are just clever enough, and have just enough originality to get talked about and written about by the cultured few. It was a love story, ending tragically—a story of ruined lives and broken hearts, told in the autobiographical form; with a careful disregard of all conventional ornament, which gave an air of reality where all was inherently false. Pamela thought it must be Castellani's own story. She fancied she could see the traces of those heart-breaking experiences, those crushing disappointments, in his countenance, in his bearing even, and in the tones of his voice, which gave an impression of mental fatigue, as of a man worn out by a fatal passion.

The story of "*Nepenthe*" was as old as the hills—or at least as old as the Boulevard des Capucines and the Palais Royal. It was the story of a virtuous young man's love for an unvirtuous woman—the story of Demetrius and Lamia—the story of a man's demoralization under the influence of incarnate falsehood, of the gradual lapse from good to evil, the gradual extinction of every belief and every scruple, the final destruction of a soul.

The wicked syren was taken, her victim was left: but left to expiate that miserable infatuation by an after-life of musing; left without a joy in the present or a hope in the future.

"He looks like it," thought Pamela, remembering that final chapter.

Mrs. Greswold was putting a few slow stitches into the azalea leaves on her embroidery frame, and listening to Mr. Castellani with an air of polite indifference.

"Do you know that Riverdale is quite the most delightful house I have ever stayed in?" he said; "and I have stayed in a great many. And do you know that Mrs. Hillersdon is heart-broken at your never having called upon her?"

"I am sorry so small a matter should touch Mrs. Hillersdon's heart."

"She feels it intensely. She told me so yesterday. Perfect candour is one of the charms of her character. She is as emotional

and as transparent as a child. Why have you not called on her?"

"You forget that Riverdale is seven miles from this house."

"Does not your charity extend so far? Are people who live seven miles off beyond the pale? I think you must visit a little further afield than seven miles. There must be some other reason."

"There is another reason, which I had rather not talk about."

"I understand. You consider Mrs. Hillersdon a person not to be visited. Long ago, when you were a child in the nursery, Mrs. Hillersdon was an undisciplined, inexperienced girl, and the world used her hardly. Is that old history never to be forgotten? Men, who know it all, have agreed to forget it: why should women, who only know a fragment, so obstinately remember?"

"I know nothing and remember nothing about Mrs. Hillersdon. My friends are for the most part those of my husband's choice, and I pay no visits without his approval. He does not wish me to visit at Riverdale. You have forced me to give a plain answer, Mr. Castellani."

"Why not? Plain truth is always best. I am sorry Mr. Greswold has interdicted my charming friend. You can have no idea how excellent a woman she is, or how admirable a wife. Tom Hillersdon might have searched the county from border to border and not have found as good a woman—looked at as the woman best calculated to make him happy. And what delightful people she has brought about him. One of the most interesting men I ever met arrived yesterday, and is to preach the hospital sermon at Romsey next Sunday. He is an old friend of yours."

"A clergyman, and an old friend of mine, at Riverdale?"

"A man of ascetic life and extraordinary culture. I never heard any man talk of Dante better than he talked to me last night in a moonlight stroll on the terrace, while the other men were in the smoking-room."

"Surely you do not mean Mr. Cancellor, the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's, Parchment Street."

"That is the man. Clement Cancellor, Vicar of St. Elizabeth's. He looks like a mediæval monk, just stepped out of one of Perrugini's altar pieces."

"He is the noblest, most unselfish of men; he has given his life to doing good among rich and poor. It is so long since I have seen him. We have asked him to Enderby very often, but he has always been too busy to come. And to think that he should be coming to this neighbourhood and I know nothing about it; and to think that he should go to Riverdale rather than come here!"

"He had hardly any option. It was Mrs. Hillersdon who asked him to preach on Hospital Sunday. She extorted a promise from him three months ago in London. The Vicar of

Romsey was enchanted. 'You are the cleverest woman I know,' he said. 'No one else could have got me such a great gun.'

"A great gun—Mr. Cancellor a great gun! I can only think of him as I knew him when I was twelve years old, a tall, thin young man in a very shabby coat—he was curate at St. Elizabeth's then—very gaunt and hollow-cheeked, but with such a sweet smile. He used to come twice a week to teach me the history of the Bible and the Church. He made me love both."

"He is gaunt and hollow-cheeked still, very tall and bony and sallow, and he still wears a shabby coat. You will not find much difference in him I fancy—only so many more years of hard work and self-sacrifice, ascetic living and nightly study. A man to know Dante as he does must have given years of his life to that one poet—and I am told that in literature Cancellor is an all-round man. His monograph on Pascal is said to be the best of a brilliant series of such studies."

"I hope he will come to see his old pupil before he leaves the neighbourhood."

"He means to do so. He was talking of it yesterday evening—asking Mrs. Hillersdon if she was intimate with you—so awkward for poor Mrs. Hillersdon."

"I shall be very glad to see him again," said Mildred gently.

"May I drive him over to tea to-morrow afternoon?"

"He will be welcome here at any time."

"Or with any one? If Mrs. Hillersdon were to bring him, would you still refuse to receive her?"

"I have never refused to receive her. We have met and talked to each other on public occasions. If Mr. Cancellor likes her she cannot be unworthy."

"May she come with him to-morrow?" persisted Castellani.

"If she likes," faltered Mildred, wondering that any woman could so force an entrance to another woman's house.

She did not know that it was by such entrances Mrs. Hillersdon had made her way in society, until half the best houses in London had been opened to her.

"If you are not in a hurry to leave us, I know my niece would much like to hear you play," she said, feeling that the talk about Riverdale had been dull work for Pamela.

Miss Ransome murmured assent.

"If you will play something of Beethoven's," she entreated.

"Do you object to Mozart?" he asked, forgetting his depreciation of the valet-musician's son a few days before. "I feel more in the humour for that prince of dramatists. I will give you the supper in 'Don Giovanni.' You shall see Leporello trembling. You shall hear the tramp of ghostly feet."

And then, improvizing upon a familiar theme, he gave his own version of that wonderful scene, and that music so played

conjured up a picture as vivid as ever playhouse furnished to an enthralled audience.

Pamela listened in silent rapture. What a God-gifted creature this was, who had so deeply moved her by his pen, who moved her even more intensely by that magical touch upon the piano.

When he had played those last crashing chords which consigned the profligate to his doom, he waited for a minute or so, and then, softly, as if almost unawares, in mere absent-minded idleness, his hands wandered into the staccato accompaniment of the serenade, and with the finest tenor Mildred had heard since she heard Sims Reeves, he sang those delicate and dainty phrases with which the seducer woos his last divinity.

He rose from the piano at the close of that lovely air, smiling at his hearers.

"I had no idea that you were a singer as well as a pianist," said Mildred.

"You forget that music is my native tongue. My father taught me to play before he taught me to read, and I knew harmony before I knew my alphabet. I was brought up in the house of a man who lived only for music—to whom all stringed instruments were as his mother tongue. It was by a caprice that he made me play the piano—which he rarely touched himself."

"He must have been a great genius," said Pamela with girlish fervour.

"Alas! no, he just missed greatness, and he just missed genius. He was a highly-gifted man—various—capricious—volatile—and he married a woman with just enough money to ruin him. Had he been obliged to earn his bread, he might have been great. Who can say? Hunger is the slave driver with his whip of steel, who peoples the Valhalla of nations. If Homer had not been a beggar—as well as blind—we might have had no 'Tale of Troy.' Good-bye, Mrs. Greswold. Good-bye," shaking hands with Pamela. "I *may* bring my hostess to-morrow?"

"I—I—suppose so," Mildred answered feebly, wondering what her husband would think of such an invasion.

Yet, if Clement Cancellor, who to Mildred's mind had seemed ever the ideal Priest of Christ, if he could tolerate and consort with her, could she, Mildred Greswold, persist in the Pharisee's part, and hold herself aloof from this neighbour, to whose good works and kindly disposition many voices had testified?

CHAPTER XIII.

SHALL SHE BE LESS THAN ANOTHER?

It was in all good faith that Clement Cancellor had gone to Riverdale. He had not gone there for the fleshpots of Egypt

He was a man of severely ascetic habits, who ate and drank as temperately as a disciple of that old faith of the east which is gaining a curious influence upon our new life of the west. For him the gratification of the senses, soft raiment, artistic furniture, thorough-bred horses and luxurious carriages, palm-houses and orchid-houses, offered no temptation. He stayed in Mrs. Hillersdon's house because he was her friend, her friend upon the broadest and soundest basis on which friendship could be built. He knew all that was to be known about her. He knew her frailties of the past, her virtues in the present, her exalted hope in the future. From her own lips he had heard the story of Louise Lorraine's life. She had extenuated nothing. She had not withheld from him either the magnitude of her sins or their number—nay it may be that she had in somewise exaggerated the blackness of those devils, whom he, Clement Cancellor, had cast out from her, enhancing by just so much the magnitude of the work he had wrought. She had held back nothing; but over every revelation she had contrived to spread that gloss which a clever woman knows how to give to the tale of her own wrongdoing. In every incident of that evil career she had contrived to show herself more sinned against than sinning; the fragile victim of over-mastering wickedness in others; the martyr of man's treachery and man's passion; the sport of fate and circumstance. Had Mr. Cancellor known the world he lived in half as well as he knew the world beyond he would hardly have believed so readily in the lady who had been Louise Lorraine; but he was too single-minded to doubt a repentant sinner whose conversion from the ways of evil had been made manifest by so many good works, and such unflagging zeal in the exercises of the Anglican Church.

Parchment Street, Grosvenor Square, is one of the fashionable streets of London, and St. Elizabeth's, Parchment Street, had gradually developed, in Clement Cancellor's incumbency, into one of the most popular temples at the West End of London. He whose life-desire had been to carry the lamp of the faith into dark places, to be the friend and teacher of the friendless and the untaught, found himself almost in spite of himself a fashionable preacher, and the delight of the highly cultured, the wealthy and the aristocratic. In his parish of St. Elizabeth's there was plenty of work for him to do—plenty of that work which he had chosen as the mission that had been given to him to fulfil. Behind those patrician streets where only the best-appointed carriages drew up, where only the best-dressed footmen ever pulled the bells or rattled long peals upon high-art knockers, there were some of the worst slums in London, and it was in those slums that half Mr. Cancellor's life was spent. In narrow alleys between Oxford and Wigmore Streets, in the intricate purlieus of Marylebone Lane the Anglican priest had ample scope for his labour, a field offering free play to the husbandman. And in the labyrinth

hidden in the heart of West-end London Mr. Cancellor's chief coadjutor for the last twenty years had been Louise Hillersdon. Thoroughness was the supreme quality of Mrs. Hillersdon's mind. Nothing stopped her. It was this temper which had given her distinction in the days when princes were her cup-bearers and diamonds her daily tribute. There had been other women as beautiful, other women as fascinating; but there was not one who with beauty and fascination combined the reckless audacity and the indomitable resolution of Louise Lorraine. When Louise Lorraine took possession of a man's wits and a man's fortune that man was doomed. He was as completely gone as the lemon in the iron squeezer. A twist of the machine, and there is nothing left but broken rind and crushed pulp. A season of infatuation, and there was nothing left of Mrs. Lorraine's admirer but shattered health and an overdrawn banking account. Estates, houses, friends, position, good name, all had vanished from the man whom Louise Lorraine ground in her mortar. She spoke of him next season with half contemptuous pity. "Did I know Sir John Barrymore? Yes; he used to come to my parties sometimes. A nice fellow enough, but such a terrible fool."

When Louise Lorraine married Tom Hillersdon, and took it into her head to break away altogether from her past career, to pose before the world as a beautiful Magdalen, she was clever enough to know that to achieve any place in society, she must have a very powerful influence to help her. She was clever enough to discover that the one influence which a woman in her position could count upon was the influence of the Church. She was beautiful enough and refined enough to win friends among the clergy by the charm of her personality. She was rich enough to secure such friends, and bind them to herself by the splendour of her gifts, by her substantial aid in those good works which are to the priest as the very breath of his life. One man she could win by an organ; another lived only to complete a steeple; the third had been yearning for a decade for that golden hour when the cracked tintinabulation which now summoned his flock should be exchanged for the music of a fine peal of bells. Such men as these were only too easily won, and the drawing-rooms of the great house in Park Lane were rarely without the grace of some priestly figure in long frock coat and Roman collar.

Clement Cancellor was of a sterner stuff, and not to be bought by bell or reredos, rood-screen or pulpit. Him Louise Hillersdon won by larger measures: to him she offered all that was spiritual and aspiring in her nature, and this woman of strange memories was not without spiritual aspirations and real striving after godliness. Clement Cancellor was no pious simpleton, to be won by studied hypocrisies and crocodile tears. He knew truth from falsehood, had never in his life been duped by the jingle of false coin. He knew that Mrs. Hillersdon's repentance had the true

ring, albeit she was in some things still of the earth, earthy. She had worked for him and with him in that wilderness of London as not one other woman in his congregation had ever worked. To the lost of her own sex she had been as a redeeming angel. Wretched women had blessed her with their expiring breath, had died full of hopes that might never have been kindled had not Louise Lorraine sat beside their beds. Few other women had ever so influenced the erring of her sex. She who had waded deep in the slough of sin knew how to talk to these sinners.

Mr. Cancellor never forgot her as he had seen her by the bed of death and in the haunts of iniquity. She could never be to him as the herd of women. To the mind of the Preacher she had a higher value than one in twenty of those women of his flock whose unstained lives had never needed the cleansing of self sacrifice and difficult works.

Thus it was that the vicar of St. Elizabeth's had never shrunk from acknowledging Mrs. Hillersdon as his personal friend, had never feared to sit at her board, or to be seen with her in public; and in the work of Louise Lorraine's rehabilitation Mr. Cancellor was a tower of strength. And now this latest mark of friendship, this visit to her country home, and this appearance in the noble old Abbey Church at her solicitation, filled her cup of pride. These starched county people who had shunned her hospitalities were to see that one of the most distinguished preachers in the High Church party had given her his friendship and his esteem.

It had been something for her to have had the Prince at Riverdale: it was still more to her to have Clement Cancellor.

Pamela was in a flutter of excitement all Saturday morning, in the expectation of Castellani's reappearance in the afternoon. She had heard Mr. Cancellor preach, and was delighted at the idea of seeing him in the pleasant intimacy of afternoon tea. Had there been no such person as Castellani, her spirits would have been on tip-toe at the idea of conversing with the fashionable preacher—of telling him in hushed and reverent tones of all those deep emotions his eloquence had inspired in her. But the author of "Nepenthe" possessed just that combination of gifts and qualities which commands the admiration of such a girl as Pamela. That exquisite touch on the piano, that perfect tenor voice, that semi-exotic elegance of dress and figure, all had made their mark upon the sensitive plate of a girl's ardent fancy. "If I had pictured to myself the man who wrote 'Nepenthe,' I should have imagined just such a face, just such a style," thought Pamela, quite forgetting that when first she had read the book she had made a very vivid picture of the author altogether the opposite of César Castellani—a dark man, lean as a whipping post, grave as philosophy itself, with sombre black eyes, and ebon hair, and a complexion of antique marble. And now she was

ready to accept the Italian, sleek, supple, essentially modern in every grace and attribute, in place of that sage of antique mould.

She went dancing about with the dogs all the morning, inciting the grave Kassandra to unwonted exertions, running in and out of the drawing-room, making an atmosphere of life and gaiety in the grave old house. Mildred's heart ached as she watched that flying figure in the white gown, youth, health, joyousness personified.

"Oh, if my darling were but here, life might be full of happiness again," she thought. "I should cease to weary myself with wondering about that hidden past."

Do what she would her thoughts still dwelt upon the image of that wife who had possessed George Greswold's heart before her. She knew that he must have loved that other woman whom he had sworn before God's altar to cherish. He was not the kind of man to marry for any motive but a disinterested love. That he had loved passionately, and that he had been wronged deeply, was Mildred's reading of the mystery. There had been a look of agony in his countenance when he spoke of the past that told of a sorrow too deep for words.

"He has never loved me as he once loved her," thought Mildred, who out of the wealth of her own love had developed the capacity for that self-torture called jealousy.

It seemed to her that her husband had taken pains to avoid the old opportunities of confidential talk since that revelation of last Sunday. He had been more than usually engaged by the business details of his estate; and she fancied that he made the most of all those duties which he used once to perform with the utmost despatch, grudging every hour that was spent away from the home circle. He now complained of the new steward's ignorance, which threw so much extra work upon himself.

"After jogging on for years in the same groove with a man who knew every inch of the estate and every tenant, I find it hard work teaching a new man," he told his wife.

This sounded reasonable enough, yet she could but think that since Sunday he had taken pains to avoid being alone with her. If he asked her to drive or walk with him, he secured Pamela's company before the excursion was planned.

"We must show you the country," he said.

Mildred told him of the threatened incursion from Riverdale as they sat at luncheon with Pamela.

"I hope you don't mind my receiving Mrs. Hillersdon," she said.

"No, my dear, I think it would take a much worse woman than Mrs. Hillersdon to do you any harm, or Pamela either, I hope. Whatever her early history may have been, she has made Tom Hillersdon an excellent wife, and she has been a very good friend to the poor. I should not have cared for you to cultivate Mrs. Hillersdon, or the society she brings round her at Riverdale——"

"Sir Henry says they have people from the music halls," interjected Pamela in an awe-stricken voice.

"But if Mrs. Hillersdon likes to come here with her clerical star——"

"Don't call him a star, George. He is highly gifted, and people have chosen to make him the fashion, but he is the most single-hearted and simple-minded man I ever met. No popularity could spoil him. I feel that if he holds out the hand of friendship to Mrs. Hillersdon she must be a good woman."

"Let her come, Mildred, only don't let her coming open the door to intimacy. I would not have my wife the friend of any woman with a history."

"And yet there are histories in most lives, George, and there is sometimes a mystery."

She could not refrain from this little touch of bitterness, yet she was sorry the instant she had spoken, deeply sorry, when she saw the look of pain in the darkly thoughtful face opposite to her. Why should she wilfully wound him, purposelessly, needlessly, she who so fondly loved him, whose keenest pain was to think that he had loved any woman upon earth before he loved her?

"You will be at home to help me to receive my old friend, George," she said as they rose from the table.

"Yes, I will be at home to welcome Cancellor, and to guard you from his *protégée's* influence, if I can."

They were all three in the drawing-room when the Riverdale party arrived. Mildred and Mrs. Hillersdon met in some wise as old acquaintances, having been thrown together on numerous occasions at hunt balls, charity bazaars, and other public assemblies. Pamela was the only stranger.

Although the romance and the scandal of Louise Lorraine's career was called ancient history, she was still a beautiful woman. The delicate features, the pure tones of the alabaster skin, and the large Irish grey eyes had been kindly dealt with by Time. On the verge of fifty, Mrs. Hillersdon might have owned only to forty, had she cared so far to palter with truth. Her charm was, however, now more in a fascinating personality than in the remains of a once dazzling loveliness. There was mind in the keen, bright face, with its sharply-cut lines, and those traces of intellectual wear which give a new grace, instead of the old one of soft and youthful roundness and faultless colouring. The bloom was gone from the peach, the brilliancy of youth had faded from those speaking eyes, but there was all the old sweetness of expression which had made Louise Lorraine's smile irresistible as the song of the Lurlei in the days that were gone. Her dress was perfect, as it had always been from the days when she threw away her last cotton stocking, darned by her own fair hands, and took to dressing like a princess of the blood royal, and with per-

haps even less concern for cost. She dressed in perfect harmony with her age and position. Her gown was of softest black silk, draped with some semi-diaphanous fabric and clouded with Chantilly lace. Her bonnet was of the same lace and gauze, and her long thin hand was fitted to perfection in a black glove which met a cloud of lace just below the elbow.

At a period when almost every woman who wore black glittered with beads and bangles from head to foot, Mrs. Hillersdon's costume was unembellished by a single ornament. The Parisian milliner had known how to obey her orders to the letter when she stipulated *surtout point de jais*; and the effect was at once distinguished and refined.

Clement Cancellor greeted his old pupil with warm friendliness, and meekly accepted her reproaches for all those invitations which he had refused in the past ten years.

"You told me so often that it was impossible, and yet you can go to my neighbour," she said.

"My dear Mildred, I went to Riverdale because I was wanted at Romsey."

"And do you think you were not wanted at Romsey before to-day—do you think we should not have been proud to have you preach in our church here? People would have flocked from far and wide to hear you—yes, even to Enderby Church—and you might have aided some good work, as you are going to do to-morrow. How clever of Mrs. Hillersdon to know how to tempt you down here."

"You may be sure it is not the first time I have tried, Mrs. Greswold," said the lady with her fascinating smile. "Your influence would have gone further than mine had you taken as much trouble as I have done."

Mr. Rollinson, the curate of Enderby, was announced at this moment. The vicar was a rich man with another parish in his cure, and his own comfortable Vicarage and his brother's family mansion being adjacent to the other church, Enderby saw him but seldom, and Mr. Rollinson was a person of much more weight in the parish than the average clerical subaltern. Mildred liked him for his plain-sailing Christianity and unfailing kindness to the poor, and she had asked him to tea this afternoon, knowing that he would like to meet Clement Cancellor.

Castellani looked curiously unlike those three other men, with their grave countenances and unstudied dress: George Greswold roughly clad in shooting-jacket and knickerbockers; the two priests in well-worn black. The Italian made a spot of brightness in that sombre assembly, the sunlight touching his hair and moustache with glints of gold, his brown velvet coat and light grey trousers suggestive of the studio rather than of rustic lanes, a gardenia in his button-hole, a valuable old intaglio for his scarf-pin, and withal a half-insolent look of amusement at those two

priests and the sombre-visaged master of the house. He slipped with serpentine grace to the further side of the piano, where he contrived his first *tete-a-tete* with Pamela, comfortably sheltered by the great Henri Deux vase of gloxinias on the instrument.

Pamela was shy at first, and would hardly speak; then taking courage, told him how she had wondered and wept over "Nepenthe," and they talked as if they were two kindred souls that had been kept too long apart by adverse fate, and thrilled with the new delight of union.

Round the tea-table the conversation was of a graver cast. After a general discussion of the threatening clouds upon the political and ecclesiastical horizon, the talk had drifted to a question which at this time was very much in the minds of men. The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill had been thrown out by the Upper House during the last session, and everybody had been talking of that debate in which three princes of the blood royal had been attentive auditors. They had recorded their vote on the side of liberty of conscience, but in vain. Time-honoured prejudices had prevailed against modern enlightenment.

Clement Cancellor was a man who would have suffered martyrdom for his faith; he was generous, he was merciful, gentle, self-sacrificing, pure in spirit; but he was not liberal minded. The old shackles hung heavily upon him. He could not forgive Wycliffe, and he could not love Latimer. He was an ecclesiastic after the antique pattern. To him the marriage of a priest was a base paltering with the lusts of the flesh; and to him a layman's marriage with a dead wife's sister was unholy and abominable. He had been moved to indignation by the words that had been spoken and the pamphlets that had been written of late upon this question, and now, carried away by George Greswold's denunciation of that prejudiced majority by which the bill had been rejected, Mr. Cancellor gave his indignation full vent, and forgot that he was speaking in a lady's drawing-room and before feminine hearers.

He spoke of such marriages as unholy and immoral; he spoke of such households as accursed. Mildred listened to him, and watched him wonderingly, scared at this revelation of an unknown side of his character. To her he had ever been the gentlest of teachers; she saw him now pallid with wrath—she heard him breathing words of fire.

George Greswold took up the glove, not because he had ever felt any particular interest in this abstract question of canonical law, but because he hated narrow-minded opinions and clerical prejudices.

"Why should the sister of his wife be different to a man from all other women? You may call her different—you may set her apart—you may say she must be to him as his own sister—her beauty must not touch him, the charms that fascinate other

men must have no influence over him. You may lay this down as a law—civil—canonical—what you will—but the common law of nature will override your clerical code, will burst your shackles of prejudice and tradition. Shall Rachel be withheld from him who was true and loyal to Leah? She has dwelt in his house as his friend, the favourite and playmate of his children. He has respected her as he would have respected any other of his wife's girl-friends; but he has seen that she was fair; and if God takes the wife, and he, remembering the sweetness of that old friendship, and his children's love, turns to her as the one woman who can give him back his lost happiness, rekindle the sacred fire of the domestic hearth—is he to be told that this one woman can never be his, because she was the sister of his first chosen? She has come out of the same stock whose loyalty he has proved, she would bring to his hearth all the old sweet associations ——”

“And she would *not* bring him a second mother-in-law. What a stupendous superiority she would have *there*,” interjected the jovial Rollinson, who had been wallowing in hot-buttered cakes and strong tea, until his usually roseate visage had become startlingly rubicund.

He was in all things the opposite of the Vicar of St. Elizabeth's. He wrote poetry, made puns, played billiards, dined out at all the houses in the neighbourhood that were worth dining at, and was only waiting to marry until Tom Hillersdon should be able to give him a living.

Mr. Cancellor reproved the ribald jester with a scathing look, before he took up the argument against his host.

“If this bill were to pass, no virtuous woman could live in the house of a married sister,” he said.

“That is as much as to say that no honest woman can live in the house of any married man,” retorted Greswold hotly. “Do you think if a man is weak enough to fall in love with another woman under his wife's roof he is less likely to succumb to her fascinations because your canonical law stares him in the face telling him, ‘Thou can'st never wed her.’ The married man who is false to his wife is not influenced by the chances of the future. He is either a bold, bad man whose only thought is to win the woman whom he loves at any cost of honour or conscience, or he is a weak fool who drifts hopelessly to destruction, and in whom the resolution of to-day yields to the temptation of to-morrow. Neither type is influenced one jot by the consideration whether he can or cannot marry the woman he loves under the unlikely circumstance of his wife's untimely death. The man who does so calculate is the one man in so many thousands of men who, as statistics may show, will poison his wife to clear the way for his new fancy. I don't think we ought to legislate for poisoners. In plain words, if a married man is weak enough or wicked enough to be seduced from his allegiance by the charms of any

woman that dwells beneath his roof, he will not be the less likely to fall because the law of the land has made that woman anathema maranatha, or because he has been warned from the pulpit that she is to be to him as his own flesh and blood, no dearer and no less dear than the sister whose rosy lips cleaved to his when he was in his cradle, beside whom he grew from infancy to manhood, and whom he has loved all his life, hardly knowing whether she is as lovely as Hebe or as ugly as Tisiphone."

"You are a disciple of the New Learning, Mr. Greswold," Cancellor said bitterly; "the learning which breaks down all barriers and annihilates the Creator of all things—the learning which has degraded God from infinite power to infinitesimal insignificance, and which explains the genius of Plato and Shakespeare, Luther and Newton, as the ultimate outcome of an unconscious primeval mist."

"I am no Darwinian," replied Greswold coldly, "but I would rather belong to his school of speculative inquiry than to the Calvinism which slew Servetus, or the Roman Catholicism which kindled the death-pile of the Oxford martyrs."

Mildred was not more anxious than Mrs. Hillersdon to end a discussion which threatened angry feeling. They looked at each other in an agony, and then with a sudden inspiration Mildred exclaimed :

"If we could only persuade Mr. Castellani to play to us. We are growing so terribly serious," and then she went to Clement Cancellor, who was standing by the open window, and took her place beside him while Mrs. Hillersdon talked with Pamela and Castellani at the piano. "You know what a privilege it is to *me* always to hear you talk," she murmured in her sweet, subdued voice. "You know how I have followed your teaching in all things. And be assured my husband is no materialist. We both cling to the old faith, the old hopes, the old promises. You must not misjudge him because of a single difference of opinion."

"Forgive me, my dear Mildred," replied Cancellor, touched by her submission. "I did wrong to be angry. I know that to many good Christians this question of marriage with a sister-in-law is a stumbling block. I have taken the subject too deeply to heart perhaps—I to whom marriage altogether seems outside the Christian priest's horizon. Perhaps I may exaggerate the peril of a wider liberty; but I, who look upon Henry VIII. as the arch-enemy of the one vital Church—of which he might have been the wise and enlightened reformer—I who trace to his unhallowed union with his brother's widow all the after evils of his career—must needs lift up my voice against a threatened danger."

A crash of mighty chords began Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and sounded like a touch of irony. Do what the preacher

might to assimilate earth to Heaven, here there would still be marrying and giving in marriage.

After the march Mildred went over to the piano and asked Castellani to sing.

He bowed a silent assent, and played the brief symphony to a ballad of Heine's, set by Jensen. The exquisite tenor voice, the perfect taste of the singer, held every one spellbound. They listened in silence, and entreated him to sing again, and then again, till he had sung four of these jewel-like ballads, and they felt that it was impertinence to ask for more.

Mildred had stolen round to her own sheltered corner, half hidden by a group of tall palms. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her head bent. She could not see the singer. She only heard the low pathetic voice, slightly veiled. It touched her like no other voice that she had ever heard since in her girlhood she burst into a passion of sobs at the opening phrase of Sims Reeves' "Come into the garden, Maud," just those seven notes, touching some hyper-sensitive chord in her own organization and moving her almost to hysteria. And now in this voice of the man whom of all other men she instinctively disliked the same tones touched the same chord, and loosened the floodgates of her tears. She sat with streaming eyes, grateful for the sheltering foliage which screened her from observation.

She dried her eyes and recovered herself with difficulty when the singer arose from the piano and Mrs. Hillersdon began to take leave. Rollinson, the curate, button-holed Castellani on the instant.

"You sing as if you had just come from the seraphic choir," he said. "You must sing for us next Friday week."

"Who are 'us'?" asked Castellani.

"Our concert in aid of the fund for putting a Burne-Jones window over the altar."

"A concert in Enderby village? Is it to be given at the lock-up or in the pound?"

"It is to be given in this room. Mrs. Greswold has been good enough to allow us the use of her drawing-room and her piano. Miss Ransome promises to preside at the buffet for tea and coffee."

"It will be glorious fun," exclaimed Pamela. "I shall feel like a barmaid. I have always envied barmaids."

"Daudet says there is one effulgent spot in every man's life—one supreme moment when he stands on the mountain top of fortune and of bliss, and from which all the rest of his existence is a gradual descent. I wonder whether that afternoon will be your effulgent spot, Miss Ransome?" said Mrs. Hillersdon laughingly.

"It will—it must. To superintend two great urns of tea and coffee—*almost* as nice as those delicious beer engines one sees at Salisbury Station—to charge people a shilling for a small cup

of tea, and sixpence for a penny sponge cake. What splendid fun !”

“ Will you help us, Mr. Castleton ?” asked the curate, who was not good at names.

“ Mrs. Greswold has only to command me. I am in all things her slave.”

“ Then she will command you—she does command you,” cried the curate.

“ If you will be so very kind——” began Mildred.

“ I am only too proud to obey you,” answered Castellani, with more earnestness than the occasion required, drawing a little nearer to Mildred as he spoke, “ only too glad of an excuse to return to this house.”

Mildred looked at him with a half-frightened expression, and then glanced at Pamela. Did he mean mischief of some kind ? Was this the beginning of an insidious pursuit of that frank, open-hearted girl, who was an heiress of quite sufficient mark to tempt the casual adventurer ?

“ Of all men I have ever seen he is the last to whom I would entrust a girl’s fate,” thought Mildred, determined to be very much on her guard against the blandishments of César Castellani.

She took the very worst means to ward off danger. She made the direful mistake of warning the girl against the possible pursuer.

“ He is a man I could never trust,” she said.

“ No more could I,” replied Pamela ; “ but oh, how exquisitely he sings !” and, excited at the mere memory of that singing, she ran to the piano and began to pick out the melody of Heine’s “ Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,” and sang the words softly in her girlish voice ; and then slipped away from the piano with a nervous little laugh.

“ Upon my word, Aunt Mildred, I am *traurig* myself at the very thought of that exquisite song,” she said. “ What a gift it is to be able to sing like that. How I wish I were César Castellani !”

“ What, when we have both agreed that he is not a good man ?”

“ Who cares about being *good* ?” exclaimed Pamela, beside herself ; “ three-fourths of the people of this world are good. But to be able to write a book that can unsettle every one’s religion ; to be able to make everybody miserable when one sings ! Those are gifts that place a man on a level with the Greek gods. If I were Mr. Castellani I should feel like Mercury or Apollo.”

“ Pamela, you frighten me when you rave like that. Remember that for all we know to the contrary this man may be a mere adventurer, and in every way dangerous.”

“ Why should we think him an adventurer ? He told me all about himself. He told me that his grandfather was under obligations to your grandfather. He told me about his father, the

composer, who wrote operas which are known all over Italy, and who died young, like Mozart and Mendelssohn. Genius is hereditary with him; he was suckled upon art. I have no doubt he is bad, irretrievably bad," said Pamela, with unction; "but don't try to persuade me that he is a vulgar adventurer who would try to borrow five-pound notes, or a fortune-hunter who would try to marry one for one's money," concluded the girl, falling back upon her favourite form of speech.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFTING THE CURTAIN.

THE charity concert afforded César Castellani just the necessary excuse for going to Enderby Manor House as often as he liked, and for staying there as long as he liked. He was now on a familiar footing. He drove, or rode over from Riverdale nearly every day in the three weeks that intervened between Mr. Cancellor's sermon and the afternoon concert. He made himself the curate's right hand in all the details of the entertainment. He chose the music, he wrote the programme, he sent it to his favourite printer to be printed in antique type upon ribbed paper, a perfect gem in the way of a programme. He scoured the country round in quest of amateur talent, and was much more successful than the curate had been in the same kind of quest.

"I'm astounded at your persuading Lady Millborough to show in the daylight," said Mr. Rollinson, laughing. "You must have exercised the tongue of the serpent to overcome her objection to the glare of the afternoon sun."

"*Estote prudentes sicuti serpentes*," said Castellani. "There's a fine old ecclesiastic's motto for you. I know Lady Millborough rather dreads the effect of sunlight upon her *nacre Bernhardt*. She told me that she was never equal to singing in the afternoon: the glare of the sun always gave her a headache. But I assured her in the first place that there should be no sun-glare—that as an artist I abhorred a crude, white light—and that it should be my business to see that our concert room was lighted upon purely artistic principles. We would have the dim religious light which painters and poets love; and in the second place I assured her that she had as fine a contralto as Madame Alboni, on whose knees I had often sat as a child, and who gave me the emerald pin I was wearing."

"My hat, what a man you are!" exclaimed Rollinson. "But do you mean to say we are to give our concert in the dark?"

"We will not have the afternoon sunshine blinding half our audience. We will have the auditorium in a cool twilight, and

we will have lamplight on our platform—just that mellow and flattering light in which elderly women look young and young women angelic.”

“We’ll leave everything to you,” cried the curate. “I think we ought to leave him free scope, ought we not, Mrs. Greswold?”

Mildred assented. Pamela was enthusiastic. This concert was to be one of the events of her life. Castellani had discovered that she possessed a charming mezzo soprano. She was to sing a duet with him. Oh, what rapture, a duet of his own composition, all about roses and love and death!

“ ’Twere sweet to die as the roses die,
If I had but lived for thee;
Yes, a life as long as the nightingale’s song
Were enough for my heart and me.”

The words and the voices were interwoven in a melodious web; tenor and soprano entwined together—always beginning again like the phrases in an anthem.

The preparation of this one duet alone obliged Mr. Castellani to be nearly every day at Enderby. A musician generally has inexhaustible patience in teaching his own music. Castellani hammered at every bar and every note with Pamela. He did not hesitate at unpleasant truths. She had received the most expensive instruction from a well-known singing master, and according to Castellani everything she had been taught was wrong. “If you had been left alone to sing as the birds sing you would be ever so much better off,” he said; “the man has murdered a very fine organ. If I had had the teaching of you, you would have sung as well as Trebelli by this time.”

Pamela thrilled at the thought. Oh, to sing like some great singer—to be able to soar skyward on the wings of music—to sing as *he* sang! She had known him a fortnight by this time, and was deeply in love with him. In moments of confidence by the piano he called her Pamela, treating her almost as if she were a child; yet with a touch of gallantry always—an air that said: “You are beautiful, dear child, and you know it—but I have lived my life.” Before Mrs. Greswold he was more formal, and called her Miss Ransome.

All barriers were down now between Riverdale and the Manor. Mrs. Hillersdon was going to make an extra large house-party on purpose to patronize the concert. It was to be on the 7th of September. The partridge shooting would be in full swing, and the shooters assembled. Mrs. Greswold had been to tea at Riverdale. There seemed to be no help for it, and George Greswold was apparently indifferent.

“My dearest, your purity of mind will be in no danger from Mrs. Hillersdon—even were she still Louise Lorraine, she could

not harm you—and you know I am not given to consider the *qu'en dira-t'on?* in such a case. Let her come here by all means, so long as she is not obnoxious to you."

"She is far from that. I think she has the most delightful manners of any woman I ever met."

"So no doubt had Circe; yet she changed men into swine."

"Mr. Cancellor would not believe in her if she were not a good woman."

"I should set a higher value on Mr. Cancellor's opinion if he were more of a man of the world, and less of a bigot. See what nonsense he talked about the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill."

"Nonsense! Oh, George, if you knew how it distressed me to hear you take the other side—the unchristian side."

"I can find no word of Christ's against such marriages, and the Church of old was always ready with a dispensation for any such union, if it was made worth the Church's while to be indulgent. You are Cancellor's pupil, Mildred, and I cannot wonder if he has made you something of a bigot."

"He is the noblest and most unselfish of men."

"I admit his unselfishness—the purity of his intentions—the tenderness of his heart—but I deny his nobility. Ecclesiastic narrow-mindedness spoils a character that might have been perfect had it been less bound and hampered by tradition. Cancellor is a couple of centuries behind the time. His church is the church of Laud."

"I thought you admired and loved him, George," said Mildred regretfully.

"I admire his good qualities; I love him for his thoroughness; but our creeds are wide apart. I cannot even pretend to think as he thinks."

This confession increased Mildred's sadness. She would have had her husband think as she thought, believe, as she believed, in all spiritual things. The beloved child they had lost was waiting for them in Heaven; and she would fain that they should both tread the same path to that better world where there would be no more tears, no more death—where day and night would be alike in the light of the great Throne. She shuddered at the thought of any difference of creed on her husband's part, shuddered at that beginning of divergence which might end in infidelity. She had been educated by Clement Cancellor, and she thought as he thought. It seemed to her that she was surrounded by an atmosphere of doubt. In the books she read, among the more cultivated people whom she met, she found the same tendency to speculative infidelity, pessimism, Darwinism, sociology, Pantheism, anything but Christian belief. The nearest approach to religious feeling seemed to be found in the theosophists, with their last fashionable Oriental improvements upon the teaching of Christ.

Clement Cancellor had trained her in the belief that there was one Church, one Creed, one Sovereign Rule of life, outside of which determinate boundary line lay the dominion of Satan. And now, seeing her husband's variance with her pastor upon this minor point of the marriage law, she began to ask herself whether those two might not stand as widely apart upon graver questions—whether George Greswold might not be one of those half-hearted Christians who attend their parish church and keep Sunday sacred because it is well to set a good example to their neighbours and dependants, while their own faith is a vanishing quantity, a memory of youthful beliefs, the fading reflection of a sun that has sunk below the horizon.

She had discovered her husband capable of a suppression of truth that was almost as bad as falsehood, and now, having begun to doubt his conscientiousness, it was not unnatural that she should begin to doubt his religious feeling.

"Had he been as deeply religious as I thought him he would not have so deceived me," she told herself, still brooding upon that mystery of his first marriage.

Castellani's presence in the house was a continual source of irritation to her. It tortured her to think that he knew more of her husband's past life than was known to herself. She longed to question him, yet refrained, feeling that there would be unspeakable meanness, treachery against her husband even, in obtaining any information on that past life except from his own lips. He had chosen to keep silence, he who could so easily have explained all things; and it was her duty to submit.

She tried to be interested in the concert, which involved a good deal of work for herself, as she was to play all the accompaniments, the piano part in a concertante duet by de Beriot with an amateur violin player, and a polacca by a modern classic by way of overture. There were rehearsals nearly every day, with much talk and tea drinking. Enderby seemed given over to bustle and gaiety—that grave old house which to her mind ought to have been silent as a sepulchre, now that Lola's voice could sound there never more.

"People must think I am forgetting her," she said to herself with a sigh, when half-a-dozen carriages had driven away from the door after two hours of bustle and confusion, much discussion as to the choice of songs, and the arrangement of the programme, which everybody wanted different.

"I cannot possibly sing 'The Three Fishers' after Mr. Scobell's 'Wanderer,'" protested Lady Millborough. "It would never do to have two dismal songs in succession."

Yet when it was proposed that her ladyship's song should succeed Mr. Rollinson's admirable rendering of George Grossmith's "He was such a Careful Man," she distinctly refused to sing immediately after a comic song.

"I am not going to take the taste of Mr. Rollinson's vulgarity out of people's mouths," she told Mildred in an audible aside.

To these God-gifted vocalists the accompanist was as an inferior being, a person with a mere mechanical gift of playing anything set before her with taste and style. They treated her as if she had been a machine.

"If you wouldn't mind going over this duet just once more I think we should feel more comfortable in it," said one of the two Miss Tadcasters, who were to take the roof off, metaphorically, in the "Giorno d'Orrore."

Mildred toiled with unwavering good nature, and suppressed her shudders at many a false note, and cast oil on the waters when the singers were inclined to quarrel. She was glad of the drudgery that kept her fingers and her mind occupied: she was glad of any distraction that changed the current of her thoughts.

It was the day before the concert. César Castellani had established himself as *l'ami de la maison*, a person who had the right to come in and out as he liked, whose coming and going made no difference to the master of the house. Had George Greswold's mind been less abstracted from the business of every-day life he might have seen danger to Pamela Ransome's peace of mind in the frequent presence of the Italian, and he might have considered it his duty, as the young lady's kinsman, to have restricted Mr. Castellani's privileges. But the blow which had crushed George Greswold's heart a little more than a year ago had left him in some wise a broken man. He had lost all interest in the common joys and occupations of every-day life. His days were spent for the most part in long walks or rides in the loneliest places he could find; his only evening amusement was found in books, and those books of a kind which engrossed his attention and took him out of himself. His wife's companionship was always precious to him; but their intercourse had lost all the old gaiety and much of the old familiarity. There was an indefinable something which held them asunder, even when they were sitting in the same room, or pacing side by side, just as of old, upon the lawn in front of the drawing-room, or idling in their summer parlour in the shade of the cedars.

Again and again in the last three weeks some question about the past had trembled upon Mildred's lips as she sat at work by the piano where Castellani played in dreamy idleness, wandering from one master to another, or extemporizing after his own capricious fancies. Again and again she had struggled against the temptation and had conquered. No, she would not stoop to a meanness. She would not be disloyal to her husband by so much as one idle question.

To-day Castellani was in high spirits, proud of to-morrow's anticipated success, in which his own exertions would count for

much. He sat at the piano in leisure hour after tea. All the performers had gone, after the final adjustment of every detail. Mildred sat idle, with her head resting against the cushion of a high-backed arm-chair, exhausted by the afternoon's labours. Pamela stood by the piano watching and listening delightedly as Castellani improvised.

"I will give you my musical transcript of St. Partridge Day," he said, smiling down at the notes as he played a lively melody with little rippling runs in the treble, and crisp staccato chords in the bass. "This is morning and all the shooters are on tip-toe with delight—a misty morning," gliding into a dreamy legato movement as he spoke. "You can scarcely see the hills yonder, and the sun is not yet up. See, there he leaps above that eastern ridge, and all is brightness," changing to brilliant arpeggios up and down the piano. "Hark, there is chanticleer. How shrill he peals in the morning air. The dogs are leaving the kennel—and now the gates are open, dogs and men are in the road. You can hear the steady tramp of the clumsy shooting boots—your dreadful English boots—and the merry music of the dogs. Pointers, setters, spaniels, smooth beasts and curly beasts, shaking the dew from the hedgerows as they scramble along the banks, flying over the ditches—creatures of lightning swiftness; yes, even those fat heavy spaniels which seem made to sprawl and snap at flies in the sunshine or snore beside the fire."

He talked in brief snatches, playing all the time—playing with the easy brilliancy, the unerring grace of one to whom music is a native tongue—as natural a mode of thought-expression as speech itself.

"I hope I don't bore you very much," he said presently, looking up at Mildred as she sat white and silent, the fair face and pale gold hair defined against the dark sea-green brocade of the chair cushion.

He looked up at her in wondering admiration, as at a beautiful picture. How lovely she was, with a loveliness that grew upon him, and took possession of his fancy and his senses with a strengthening hold day by day. It was a melancholy loveliness, the beauty of a woman whose life had come to a dead stop, in whose breast love and hope were dead—or dormant.

"Not dead," he told himself, "only sleeping. Whose shall be the magic touch to awaken the sleeper? Who shall be the Orpheus to bring back so sweet an Eurydice from the realms of Death?"

Such thoughts were in his mind as he sat looking at her, waiting for her answer, playing all the while, telling her how fair she was in the tenderest variations of an old German air whose every note breathed passionate love.

"How sweet," murmured Pamela; "what an exquisite melody," taking some of the sweetness to herself. "How could such sweet-

ness weary any one with the ghost of an ear? You are not bored by it, are you aunt?"

"Bored; no, it is delightful," answered Mildred, rousing herself from a reverie. "My thoughts went back to my childhood while you were playing. I never knew but one other person who had that gift of improvization, and she used to play to me when I was a child. She was almost a child herself, and of course she did not come within a long distance of you as a pianist; but she would sit and play to me for an hour in the twilight, inventing new melodies, or playing recollections of old melodies as she went along, describing in music. The old fairy tales are for ever associated with music in my mind, because of those old memories. I believe she was highly gifted in music."

"Music of a high order is not an uncommon gift among women of sensitive temperament," said Castellani musingly. "I take it to be only another name for sympathy. The want of musical feeling is want of sympathy. Shakespeare knew that when he declared the non-musical man to be by nature a villain. I could no more imagine you without the gift of music than I could imagine the stars without the quality of light. Mr. Greswold's first wife was musical—as no doubt you know—indeed, highly gifted as a musician."

"You heard her play—and sing?" faltered Mildred, avoiding a direct reply.

The sudden mention of her dead rival's name had quickened the beating of her heart. She had longed to question him and had refrained; and now without any act of hers he had spoken, and she was going to hear something about that woman whose existence was a mystery to her, of whose Christian name even she was ignorant.

"Yes, I heard her several times at parties at Nice. She was much admired for her musical talents. She was not a grand singer, but she had been well taught, and she had exquisite taste, and knew exactly the kind of music that suited her best. She was one of the attractions at the Palais Montano, where one heard only the best music."

"I think you said the other day that you did not meet her often," said Mildred. "My husband could hardly have forgotten you had you met frequently."

"I can scarcely say that we met frequently, and our meetings were such as Mr. Greswold would not be very likely to remember. I am not a remarkable man now; and I was a very insignificant person fifteen years ago. I was only asked to people's houses because I could sing a little, and because my father had a reputation in the south as a composer. I was never introduced to your husband, but I was presented to his wife—as a precocious youth with some pretensions to a tenor voice—and I found her very charming—after her own particular style."

"Was she a beautiful woman?" asked Mildred. "I—I—have never talked about her to my husband—she died so young—and——"

"Yes, yes, I understand," interrupted Castellani as she hesitated. "Of course you would not speak of her. There are things that cannot be spoken about. There is always the skeleton in every life—not more in Mr. Greswold's past than in that of other people, perhaps, could we know all histories. I was wrong to speak of her—her name escaped me unawares."

"Pray don't apologize," said Mildred, kindling with indignant feeling at something in his tone which hinted at wrong-doing on her husband's part. "There can be no reason why you should keep silence—to me; though any mention of an old sorrow might wound him. I know my husband too well not to know that he must have behaved honourably in every relation of life—before I knew him as well as afterwards. I only asked a very simple question—was my predecessor as beautiful as she was gifted?"

"No. She was charming, piquant, elegant, *spirituelle*, but she was not handsome. I think she was conscious of that want of perfect beauty, and that it made her sensitive and even bitter. I have heard her say hard things of women who were handsomer than herself. She had a scathing tongue and a capricious temper, and she was not a favourite with her own sex, though she was very much admired by clever men. I know that as a lad I thought her one of the brightest women I had ever met."

"It was sad that she should die so young," said Mildred.

She would not for worlds that this man should know the extent of her ignorance about the woman who had borne her husband's name. She spoke vaguely, hoping that he would take it for granted she knew all.

"Yes," assented Castellani with a sigh, "her death was infinitely sad."

He spoke as of an event of more than common sadness—a calamity that had been in some wise more tragical than even untimely death must needs be.

Mildred kept silence, though her heart ached with shapeless forebodings, though it would have been an unspeakable relief to know the worst rather than to feel the oppression of this mystery.

Castellani rose to take his leave. He was paler than he had been before the conversation began; and he had a troubled air. Pamela looked at him with sympathetic distress. "I am afraid you are dreadfully tired," she said as they shook hands.

"I am never tired—in this house," he answered; and Pamela appropriated the compliment by her vivid blush.

Mildred Greswold shook hands with him mechanically and in silence. She was hardly conscious of his leaving the room. She rose and went out into the garden, while Pamela sat down to the piano and began singing her part in the everlasting duet. She

never sang anything else nowadays; it was a perpetual carol of admiration for the author of "Nepenthe."

" 'Twere sweet to die as the roses die,
If I had but lived for thee;
'Twere sweet to fade as the twilight fades
Over the Western sea,"

she warbled, while Mildred paced slowly to and fro in front of the cedars, brooding over every word Castellani had spoken about her husband's first wife.

"Her death was infinitely sad."

Why infinitely? The significance of the word troubled her. It conjured up all manner of possibilities. Why infinitely sad? All death is sad. The death of the young especially so. But to say even of untimely death that it was infinitely sad would seem to lift it out of the region of humanity's common doom. That qualifying word hinted at a tragical fate rather than a young life cut short by any ordinary malady. There had been something in Castellani's manner which accentuated the meaning of his words. That troubled look, that deep sigh, that hurried departure, all hinted at a mystery—at a painful story which he knew and did not wish to reveal.

He had in a manner apologized for speaking of George Greswold's first wife. There must have been a reason for that. He was not a man to say meaningless things out of *gaucherie*; not a man to stumble and equivocate from either shyness or stupidity. He had implied that Mr. Greswold was not likely to talk about his first marriage—that he would naturally avoid any allusion to his first wife.

Why naturally? Why should he not speak of that past life? Men are not ordinarily reticent upon such subjects. And that a man should suppress the fact of a first marriage altogether, should falsely describe himself in the marriage register, would suggest memories so dark as to impel an honourable man to stoop to a lie rather than face the horror of revelation.

She walked up and down that fair stretch of velvet turf upon which her feet had trodden so lightly in the happy years that were gone—gone never to be recalled, as it seemed to her, carrying with them all that she had ever known of domestic peace, of wedded bliss. Never again could they two be as they had been. The mystery of the past had risen up between them—like some hooded phantom, a vaguely threatening figure, a hidden face—to hold them apart for evermore.

"If he had only trusted me," she thought despairingly, "there is hardly any sin that I would not have forgiven for love of him. Why could he not believe in my love well enough to know that I should judge him leniently—if there had been wrong-doing on his side—if—if——"

She had puzzled over that hidden past, trying to penetrate the darkness, imagining the things that might have happened—infidelity on the wife's part—infidelity on the husband's side—another and fatal attachment taking the place of loyal love. Sin of some kind there must have been, she thought—for such dark memories could scarcely be sinless. But was husband or wife the sinner?

"Her death was infinitely sad."

That sentence stood out against the dark background of mystery, as if written in fire. That one fact was absolute. George Greswold's first wife had died under circumstances of peculiar sadness; so painful that Castellani's countenance grew pale and troubled at the very thought of her death.

"I cannot endure it," Mildred cried at last in an agony of doubt. "I will not endure this torture for another day. I will appeal to him. I will question him. If he values my love and my esteem he will answer faithfully. It must be painful for him, painful for me; but it will be far better for us both in the long run. Anything will be better than these torturing fears, these imaginary evils. I am his wife, and I have a right to know the truth."

The dressing gong summoned her back to the house. Her husband was in the drawing-room half-an-hour afterwards, when she went down to dinner. He was still in his jacket and knickerbockers, just as he had come in from a long ramble.

"Will you forgive me if I dine with you in these clothes, Mildred, and you, Pamela?" to the damsel in white muslin, whom he had just surprised at the piano, still warbling her honeyed strain about death and the roses; "I came in five minutes ago—dead beat. I have been in the forest, and had a tramp with the deer-hounds over Bramble Hill."

"You walk too far, George. You are looking dreadfully tired."

"I'm sure you needn't apologize for your dress on my account," said Pamela. "Henry is a perfect disgrace half his time. He hates evening clothes, and I sometimes fear he hates soap and water. He can reconcile his conscience to any amount of dirt so long as he has his cold tub in the morning. He thinks that justifies anything. I have had to sit next him at dinner when he came straight from rats," concluded Pamela with a shudder. "But Rosalind is so foolishly indulgent. She would spoil twenty husbands."

"And you, I suppose, would be a martinet to one?" said Greswold, smiling at the girl's animated face.

"It would depend. If I were married to an artist I could forgive any neglect of the proprieties. One does not expect a man of that kind to be the slave of conventionalities; but a commonplace man like Sir Henry Mountford has nothing to recommend him but his horse and tailor."

They went to dinner, and Pamela's prattle relieved the gloom which had fallen upon husband and wife. George Greswold saw that there were signs of a new trouble in his wife's face. He sat for nearly an hour alone with the untouched decanters before him, and with Kassandra's head upon his knee. The dog always knew when his thoughts were darkest, and would not be repulsed at such times. She was not obtrusive—she only wanted to let him know there was some one in the world who loved him.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he left the dining-room. He looked in at the drawing-room door, and saw his wife and his niece sitting at work, silent both.

"I am going to the library to write some letters, Mildred," he said; "don't sit up for me."

She rose quickly and went over to him.

"Let me have half-an-hour's talk with you first, George," she said in an earnest voice; "I want so much to speak to you."

"My dearest, I am always at your service," he answered quietly, and they went across the hall together, to that fine old room which was essentially the domain of the masters of the house.

It was a large room with three long narrow windows—unaltered from the days of Queen Anne—looking out to the carriage drive in the front of the house. The walls were lined with books, in severely architectural book-cases. There was a lofty old marble chimney-piece, richly decorated, and a large knee-hole desk in front of the fireplace, at which Mr. Greswold was wont to sit. There was a shaded reading lamp ready lighted for him upon this table, and there was no other lamp in the room. By this dim light the sombre colouring of oak book-cases and maroon velvet window curtains deepened to black. The spacious room had almost a funereal aspect, like that awful banqueting hall to which the jocose Domitian invited his parasites and straightway frightened them to death.

"Well, Mildred, what is the matter?" asked Greswold, when his wife had seated herself beside him in front of the massive oak desk at which all the business of his estate had been transacted since he came to Enderby. "There is nothing amiss, love, I hope, to make you so earnest?"

"There is something very much amiss, George," she answered. "Forgive me if I pain you by what I have to say—by the questions I am going to ask. I cannot help giving you pain, and truly and dearly as I love you, I cannot go on suffering as I have suffered since that wretched Sunday afternoon when I discovered how you had deceived me—you whom I so trusted, so honoured as the most upright among men."

"It is a little hard that you should say I deceived you, Mildred. I suppressed one fact which had no bearing upon my relations with you."

"You must have signed your name to a falsehood in the register if you described yourself as a bachelor."

"I did not so describe myself. I confided the fact of my first marriage to your father on the eve of our wedding. I told him why I had been silent—told him that my past life had been steeped in bitterness. He was generous enough to accept my confidence and to ask no questions. My bride was too shy and too much troubled by the emotion of the hour to observe what I wrote in the register, or else she might have noted the word 'widower' after my name."

"Thank God you did not sign your name to a lie," said Mildred with a sigh of relief.

"I am sorry my wife of fourteen years should think me capable of falsehood on the document that sealed my fate with hers."

"Oh, George, I know how true you are—how true and upright you have been in every word and every act of your life since we two have been one. It is not in my nature to misjudge you. I *cannot* think you capable of doing wrong to any one even under strongest temptation. I cannot believe that fate could set such a snare for you as could entrap you into one dishonourable act; but I am tortured by the thought of a past life of which I know nothing. Why did you hide your marriage from me when we were lovers? Why are you silent and secret now, when I am your wife, the other half of yourself, ready to sympathize with you, to share the burden of dark memories? Trust me, George, trust me. This secret is rising up between us like a stony barrier. Trust me, dear love, and let us be again as we have been, united in every thought."

"You do not know what you are asking me, Mildred," said George Greswold, in his deep, grave voice, looking at her with haggard reproachful eyes. "You cannot measure the torture you are inflicting by this senseless curiosity."

"You cannot measure the tortures of doubt which I have suffered since I have known that you loved another woman before you loved me—loved her so well that you cannot bear even to speak of that past life which you lived with her—regret her so intensely that now, after fourteen years of wedded life with me, the mere memory of that lost love can plunge you into gloom and despair," said Mildred passionately.

That smothered fire of jealousy which had been smouldering in her breast for weeks broke out all at once in impetuous speech. She no longer cared what she said. Her only thought was that the dead love had been dearer and nearer than the living, that she had been cozened by a lover whose heart had never been wholly hers, never, even in the roseate dawn of her girlhood, nor in the sunlight of her early married life. She had been duped by her own affections, perhaps, from the very beginning.

"I thought he must love me with the same measure that I loved him," she said to herself.

"You are very cruel, Mildred," her husband answered quietly. "You are probing an old wound, and a deep one, to the quick. You degrade yourself more than you degrade me by causeless jealousy and unworthy doubts. Yes, I did conceal the fact of my first marriage—not because I had loved my wife too well—but because I had not loved her well enough. I was silent about a period of my life which was one of unutterable misery—which it was my duty to myself to forget, if it were possible to forget—which it was a peril to remember. My only chance of happiness—or peace of mind—lay in total oblivion of that bitter time. It was only when I loved you that I began to believe forgetfulness was possible to me. I courted oblivion by every means in my power. I told myself that the man who had so suffered was a man who had ceased to exist. George Ransome was dead. George Greswold stood on the threshold of a new life, with infinite capacities for happiness. I told myself that I might be a beloved and honoured husband—which I had never been; a useful member of society—which I had not been hitherto. Until that hour all things had been against me. With you for my wife, all things would be in my favour. For thirteen happy years this promise of our marriage morning was fully realized; then came my darling's death; and now comes your estrangement."

"I am not estranged, George. It is only my dread of the beginning of estrangement which tortures me. Since that man spoke of your first wife, I have brooded perpetually upon that hidden past. It is weak and foolish, I know, to have done so. I ought to trust unquestioningly; but I cannot, George, I cannot. I love you too well to love without jealousy."

"Well, let the veil be lifted, then, since it must be so. Ask what questions you please, and I will answer them—as best I can."

"You are very good," she faltered, drawing a little nearer to him, leaning her head against his shoulder as she talked to him, and laying her hand on his as it lay before him on the desk, tightly clenched. "Tell me, dear, were you happy with your first wife?"

"I was not."

"Not even in the beginning?"

"Hardly in the beginning. It was an ill-advised union, entered into upon impulse."

"But she loved you very dearly, perhaps."

"She loved me—dearly—after her manner of loving."

"And you did not love her?"

"It is a cruel thing you force me to say, Mildred. No, I did not love her."

"Had you been married long when she died?"

She felt a quivering movement in the clenched hand on which

her own lay caressingly, and she heard him draw a long and deep breath.

"About a year and a half."

"Her death was a sad one, I know. Did she go out of her mind before she died?"

"No."

"Did she leave you—or do you any great wrong?"

"No."

"Were you false to her, George—Oh, forgive me, forgive me; but there must have been something more sad than common sadness, and it might be that some new and fatal love——"

"There was no such thing," he answered sternly. "I was true to my marriage vow. It was not a long trial—only a year and a half. Even a profligate might keep faith for so short a span."

"I see you will not confide in me. I will ask no more questions, George. That kind of catechism will not make us more in sympathy with each other. I will ask you nothing more—except—just one question—a woman's question. Was your first wife beautiful in your eyes?"

"She was not beautiful, but she was intellectual, and she had an interesting countenance—a face that attracted me at first sight. It was even more attractive to me than the faces of much handsomer women. But if you would like to know what your fancied rival was like you need not languish in ignorance," he added, with some touch of scorn. "I have her photograph in this desk. I have kept it for my days of humiliation, to remind me of what I have been and what I may be again. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, George, if it will not pain you too much to show it to me."

"Do not talk of pain. You have stirred the waters of Marah so deeply that one more bitter drop cannot signify." He unlocked his desk as he spoke, lifted the lid which was sustained by a movable upright, and groped among the accumulation of papers and parchments inside.

The object for which he was seeking was at the back of the desk, under all the papers. He found it by touch, a morocco case containing a cabinet photograph. Mildred stood up beside him, with one hand on his shoulder as he searched.

He handed her the case without a word. She opened it in silence and looked at the portrait within. A small, delicately-featured face, with large, dark eyes—eyes almost too large for the face—a slender throat, thin sloping shoulders—eyes that looked out of the picture with a strange intensity, a curious alertness in the countenance as of a woman made up of nerves and emotions, a nature without the element of repose.

Mildred stared at the picture three or four seconds, and then with a choking sound like a strangled sob fell swooning at her husband's feet.

(To be continued.)

A FRENCHWOMAN IN LONDON.

BY ONE.

BEFORE I relate my first experiences of an independent life in London, it may be well to describe how it was I came to dwell in the great city.

For some years I had been a resident finishing governess, and had been fortunate enough to fall in with families of good means and position. One of these especially, with whom I resided six years, had really everything which money could buy or good taste suggest. They were very kind people, too; people with whom the generous saying of "*noblesse oblige*" was no empty phrase, but one well understood and acted up to. For my own part I was considered in every possible way, and shared to the full all the advantages they enjoyed. I believe I became a *gourmet* in the way of dinners, and a perfect sybarite in the way of all other comforts. I became susceptible to a *soupçon* of a dinner in preparation, of the smoke of a live coal fallen in the fender, even of mice in the conservatory; I delighted in the delicate fragrance of the hot-house and other flowers which were nearly everywhere in the house; in short, the keen appreciation I have naturally for the best and most beautiful was entirely satisfied there.

The house, which looked like a French *château* in the Renaissance style, stood on the side of a hill in the fairest part of the Thames valley, and commanded a fine view of undulating woods and pastures reaching down from the sky line to the beautiful river itself. Within the house all was comfort and elegance; masterpieces in oil and water colours, of marble and ivory, and gems of wood carving met the eye on every side. After I had been there but a short time, I felt as if I had never lived otherwise—in fact I was living in my element.

But those happy years passed away all too soon, and the time came when my services were no longer required. The day on which I had to bid good-bye to people who had indeed been friends to me and had made me feel as one of themselves, was come at last. I recalled a day some eight years before, when I left my home to face the cold world alone; I was eighteen then. Misery and wretchedness filled my heart as the train swept past one familiar scene after another.

At my destination—the town house of the kind people I had just left—I began to realize how much I had lost. It was early in February; the day was bitterly cold, and rain and sleet had been falling. The house, not having been recently occupied, seemed cold and cheerless; and the feeling was increased by the look of the covered furniture and pictures. Still, there was a nice fire burning in the library, and that room at least looked cosy enough, being kept free from dust sheets and always ready for the use of any member of the family who might chance to come to town on shopping or other business.

If I already felt cold and wretched, what would it be thereafter? The nice motherly housekeeper came out smiling to meet me and to hear the latest news of the family. Soon she asked me what would I like for my dinner, and what should she get for my breakfast to-morrow. Alas, it was no time to ask me what I wanted to eat! It seemed to me as if the consumption of food was only to be considered by happy people, and that wretched ones had nothing whatever to do with it.

“Whatever you like, Mrs. Carry; you always know best what is nice,” was my wise reply.

The house had been placed at my service, that I might stay there until I had found some comfortable abode to settle in. Comfortable abode! What a mockery! As I look back now upon that time, I marvel at myself and wonder how I survived the looking for the “comfortable abode” and my settling in it when found! Not that I am by any means sure that I am much better off now; but still I have become hardened, and can almost enjoy “roughing it.” I had decided not to enter another family, but to take lodgings and give private lessons. I felt I could not bring myself to live among strangers again. I remembered how long it had taken me to get accustomed to the people I had just left. Probably I should not find new people like the old ones, and I should always be making comparisons unfavourable to the former; I should feel and look miserable, and they would be dissatisfied with me. This I could not have borne; it would have wounded my pride. No, I would take lodgings and give lessons, or take only visiting engagements. I had always had good salaries, and felt no doubt about being able still to earn a sufficient income. Since I left home I had been able to put by a good round sum of money; but unfortunately I had invested it so badly that I lost nearly all, and could only command about thirty pounds at the time I left the place which had been my second home.

This was to keep me until I should find engagements enough to live out of. I was not disheartened, though wretched; and on my first morning alone in London I sallied out, full of confidence that many happy days were in store for me, in search of a lodging. I had made up my mind that I would not be extravagant at first,

that until my affairs were running smoothly I would be content with but one room. The prospect of having soon to fit up a bed and sitting room quite cheered me up. As I sat by the fire in the library, I revelled in the furnishing of dozens of rooms. Here in this corner I would have a divan; of course I could not afford a regular one, but I should order two or three boxes of a certain length and size which would fit to each other. If I should have to move they would be so useful to pack odds and ends in. Then I would make cushions of some sweet material from Liberty's, filled with feathers—down would be too expensive. Then the curtains—well, they would be of a greenish colour; the carpet should be a warm red, and the wall paper blush-rose, or at any rate something of that kind. Of course I would have plenty of flowers—violets or mignonette—so as to have the air always deliciously scented. I would invite So-and-so to tea sometimes, and of course my pupils would often be running in—my pupils and I are always great friends—and I could see myself often at the confectioner's ordering such "goodies" as they liked best.

What a fool's paradise it was! How I managed to keep up my spirits and even dream of the future still, after having taken my first look into a lodging house, I cannot now understand. But I did.

But it was not pleasant, even at first. There was I, looking into one dingy hole after another and coming out unsuited, but bright as ever, saying repeatedly to myself, "Never mind; I shall soon find something suitable; perhaps a sweet little room in the house of a respectable family, the father a clerk perhaps, and the mother a kind matronly woman, with one or two nicely-brought-up daughters; they let a spare room in their comfortable little house just to help towards the household expenses." With such like reasoning I kept up my spirits on the whole—but it was only *on the whole*. While I was in a house, looking at the room advertised on a card in the windows or outside as to let, I was very miserable.

Generally my knock or ring was answered by a dirty, dishevelled woman whose very appearance was enough to frighten me. My first impulse was always to run away; but the steady gaze of the harpy would hold me immovable until I confessed that I wished to see the room which was to let.

"Do you want it for yourself?" said one awful woman to me.

"Yes."

"Are you in all day?"

"Well, I cannot say for certain yet, but I hope not."

She looked at me suspiciously. "You are not in business, then."

"No, I——"

"We prefer a gentleman who is out all day," she broke in sharply.

"Very well; good afternoon." I went out thinking that gentlemen were quite welcome to such a nice landlady.

A more wholesome-looking woman answered my next summons, and my hopes revived a little.

"We don't take in ladies. My husband objects to them," she said at once in reply to my inquiry about the room to let. Rather startled at this unexpected announcement, I made a hasty retreat toward the street.

"Perhaps you don't go out late in the evening?" she said quickly and in a more conciliatory tone of voice.

"I don't know what I should go out in the evening for; but as your husband objects to ladies taking a room in your house, we need say no more. Good afternoon."

"But perhaps it will be different in your case. Come and see the room."

"I don't think it will be any use."

"You needn't take the room unless you like it," she urged.

I had to go. It was not a bad little room, but very tiny; with my three big boxes in it I should not have room enough to turn round. During our inspection the landlady dilated volubly on the woes and troubles of a lodging-house keeper, and gave me the entire history of a former tenant, a governess who had spent five long months seeking a situation, finding one at last which happily had proved worth waiting for.

"All's well that ends well," said I. "Your room is very clean and nice, but I am afraid it would be too small for me. I will take your address though, in case I do not find anything to suit me better." I had become quite cordially disposed towards the woman whose husband objected to ladies.

At the next house I stopped at I was received by a woman whose breath was simply reeking of spirits. However, as I did not notice it until after I had stated my object in calling, I could not retreat, so followed her upstairs. The room she showed me was very dull-looking and painfully dusty, in fact it seemed as if the dust had become petrified in lines corresponding to the shape of the furniture. It looked out on to three black walls, surmounted by a solemn-looking row of chimney-pots. Except for the inconvenience of having committed some crime or other, I think that, as a mere matter of choice, I should have preferred a prison-cell to this room.

"Well, do you want it to-night?" the fragrant landlady inquired, in the tone of a sergeant addressing a recruit.

Her harsh voice recalled me from my meditations just as I had begun to picture the undoubted advantages of a clean prison cell compared to this dirty hole.

"Oh, no; I should not want it to-night. In fact, I am in no hurry. I wish to look at several rooms and take the best."

This seemed to raise the wrath of the old lady.

"What are you coming bothering people for if you don't want to engage a room at once? The idea!"

She rushed out of the room and stamped angrily down the stairs, murmuring all the while, "The idea, indeed, of troubling one like that just to look at a room! The idea!"

I hurried after her, only too anxious to get out of that den. When I found myself in the doorway I turned and said, not very wisely, perhaps, "You are distinctly very rude."

"It is you who are rude, bothering one for nothing," I believe she said.

I stepped quickly out of the doorway just as she slammed the door violently in my face.

If I had been shy at knocking at strange people's doors before, after this I was utterly unnerved; I was outraged, and quite trembled with indignation. I had never heard the like before, and from such a woman, too! However, after a while I got calmer, and the little scene really gave me a little more *aplomb* and thus was of some service to me after all. Before I had only felt a few drops of cold water, but that episode was certainly a *douche*. Ah, well, a few cold drops would never hurt or shock me any more.

The rooms I had seen were one and all utterly uninviting. In vain did I in imagination remove from the walls all the bad and stupid pictures and hang up my own nicely-framed sketches and paintings; in vain did I banish the bottle-green ornament from the mantelpiece; in vain did I drape the window with some Liberty's muslin and put a tasteful cover over the bed. No, it was all in vain. The ugly yellow painted chest of drawers could not be transformed; the chairs, cane-bottomed and black with stains, would always stand there; the threadbare carpet, patched here and there with pieces of a different pattern, would always assert itself through any number of rugs and mats I could put down; besides, what a pity it would be to damage my pretty rugs by laying them upon such a dirty carpet. And then I began to reflect that if I should require so many additions to make a furnished room decently habitable, I might as well get a bedstead and a few other things and take an unfurnished room, in which I should not be cursed with dirt-grimed chairs and dirty carpets. Yes, decidedly it would be wiser to take an unfurnished room and fit it up to my own taste. To begin with, the bed would be such a comfort. I had shuddered as I thought of having to lie down upon the beds I had seen so far, beds which had been occupied by I knew not whom—perhaps by persons dirty, ill or diseased. It was really too disgusting to think about.

As soon as this bright thought entered my mind I set off in quest of such a room, and searched well nigh every street and terrace between Earl's Court and Sloane Street. I could only find one or two "to be let unfurnished." I looked at them of course.

They were dingy little rooms all of them, with no better outlook than the worst furnished rooms I had seen. While I was looking at one of them it suddenly occurred to me that I should want some attendance even in an unfurnished room. Who would clean the grate, bring me some hot water in the morning, or cook me a chop or a fish when required? I asked the woman who was showing the room if I could have any attendance.

"Not in the house," she replied; "but I daresay you could get a charwoman who would clean the room for you if you liked."

Clearly that wouldn't do. I had resolved at the outset not to give more than ten shillings a week for the room and attendance. I soon found that an unfurnished room with attendance from outside, if I could get it, would cost me much more. I saw there was nothing to be done in that direction, and I turned my attention once more to furnished rooms.

At last, after having looked at several more, I found one which seemed the best I had been shown. The landlady was clean and well-spoken; the house was a good one and looked well cared for; the room to be let was a garret to be sure, but it had two windows looking on to the street, and it seemed perfectly clean; I could give it a bright look by rearranging it a little. It was ten shillings a week, just the sum I could give; and the landlady would for that amount send me some hot water each morning, do the room every day, and cook me any little thing like a chop or fish. I agreed to take it.

It was a bright sunshiny day when I entered my new quarters, with all my goods and chattels; nevertheless, I felt unutterably miserable and lonely. I sat for a while among my boxes and parcels like one stunned, unable to make up my mind which to unpack first, and vaguely realizing how great a change a week had brought in my life. Only a week ago I had left all that belongs to a refined and prosperous life; it seemed to me that ages separated me from that happy time. Yes, indeed! Circumstances had so changed since then that only imagination could measure the difference. I roused myself at last from my gloomy thoughts, and began to unpack the nearest box, and tried to persuade myself that all would soon be well: I should soon have many lessons to give, which would afford me sufficient occupation, and I would arrange my room in such a manner that it should be a really cosy nook in which to rest peacefully when tired or needing solitude. I worked away till the growing dusk reminded me of tea. Ah, me! Unless I went to the grocer's I should not get any. No doubt the landlady would supply me for the first day, but to-morrow I should have none. I felt it would be better to go at once and get some. I went to a shop hard by and bought some tea and marmalade; I considered I should have something substantial, too, though I was not hungry, and I bought a box of sardines and some bread. For the first time.

since my childhood I found myself laden with parcels! It was dark when I reached my attic; I had not remembered that I had no light. I went out again and purchased a lamp and some oil. Then I remembered I should require a spirit lamp and kettle to boil my water with. After reaching my room with all these purchases I thought to myself that at last I should be comfortable. Alas, I soon found I needed many other things, but I could not bring myself to sally forth again, so put off further errands until the morrow.

What a dreary night it was! Although the people were clean and respectable, I felt very suspicious about the bed when the time came to use it. I poured some eau-de-cologne on a handkerchief and placed it between my face and the pillow. It was a large bedstead and had a spring mattress under the wool one; the former was all right enough, the latter was not—it seemed filled with hard round balls, which made you fancy you were lying on a bag of potatoes. In the morning I mentioned this fact to the landlady. “Yes,” she said coolly, “it is rather a bad mattress; it wasn’t a good one when it was bought.” And with that I had to be content, or leave. I preferred to accustom myself to lie on a bag of potatoes.

When I woke on my first morning in this room it was bitterly cold, and I seemed to be in a well. I thought the thing to warm me would be to take my cold bath at once. The experiment was not very successful; I felt a kind of glow for about a quarter of an hour, and then I was shivering more than before. I lighted a fire then, but the grate was but a wee tiny one, as big as my hand, perhaps, and most of the little heat the fire gave went up the chimney. When I looked up the chimney I could see the sky; the room might well be cold! All that morning I kept up as much fire as the grate would hold, but there was no perceptible warmth a few feet away from it.

Then I thought of my lunch. The landlady would only cook me a chop or some small piece of meat; but, of course, I should require vegetables also. As I had a fire which seemed to be useless for heating, it might serve for cooking perhaps. I went out and bought a saucepan—which, as I wanted it immediately, I carried home myself—also some vegetables and a small piece of meat. My idea was to make a French *pot-au-feu*. I borrowed a knife from the kitchen, and soon had my vegetables cleaned, cut up, and placed in the saucepan on the fire. My hands were rather the worse for this employment, and were black with handling the saucepan and tending the fire by the time my meal was cooked, and my face was not much cleaner. However, I felt quite cheered up by the occupation, and was really delighted when I found that my first attempt at cooking was most successful; then I had meals enough cooked for a couple of days, and I was infinitely satisfied at my achievement.

I spent other mornings in like manner, making myself sometimes one soup and sometimes another. It was difficult, of course, to make much change with so few utensils, and I grew to be very ingenious in making them serve all purposes. I became quite proud of my skill before long, and even invited a friend to lunch one day for the fun of it. But my housekeeping arrangements showed at their best at my teas. I asked a girl student friend of mine to tea several times for the sake of her company, on which occasions the landlady lent me all extra tea things I required, and in that way I spent many cheerful hours in my garret, which were a delightful change from the rest of the time I spent indoors. The weather was mostly bitterly, bitterly cold; the winter was unusually long, and to me seemed as if it would never end; the temperature in my room never reached a higher point than 50° during my first three months. The sun never shone on my side of the house at all, and, as I said before, the fire gave out but little heat. After the first week I discovered I could burn nearly a scuttleful of coals a day. As each scuttleful cost sixpence I could not allow myself such an expense with so little result. Besides, the chimney being open to the sky, sent me back my smoke and that of other people's as well. Then I used a fire only when I wanted to cook; to keep warm at other times I put on my coat and fur cloak, in fact I never had them off except when I went to bed for the whole of that three months. The draughts in the room were fearful; the two windows would not fit at the top, one of them had a two-inch aperture (which I filled up with paper) and consequently would not fasten. I should not have been much better off if they had fitted properly, for there was such a dreadful smell of returned smoke at most times that I was obliged to keep one of them a little open nearly always. At first I could not understand what that terrible smell was, and I asked the landlady about it.

"Oh," she said, "it comes from the next-door chimney. They had it on fire some time ago and the heat cracked the brickwork between the flues, which lets their smoke come into your chimney and some of it blows down into the room."

"Well," I said, "it is very disagreeable. I am obliged to have the window open well nigh all day, and I am nearly frozen already."

"Oh, I will have it seen to some day."

"I hope soon." The soon, alas! proved to be when it was warm weather; then it was done.

Never had I felt the cold before as I did then! I had lived through two very severe winters in the Black Forest when snow and ice remained on the ground for weeks and months together—but how different it was. In the winter the air was so dry there that we hardly felt the cold; it made our blood course quickly through our veins when we went out, and we came in all in a glow and full of high spirits. Ah! but what difference there was be-

tween the nice warm houses there, with their tall china stoves and their double windows, and this garret in the middle of London! Here if I succeeded in getting my head and shoulders warm my feet were cold, and if I got my feet warm my back grew cold and cold shivers ran down my spine. Often I went out to try to warm myself by walking, but generally had to face a bitter east wind which seemed to me to blow in all directions at once, and I would retreat to my garret again chilled to the marrow.

When I opened the front door with my latch key the warmth of the house struck pleasantly upon me, and in passing up the stairs I could sometimes see into the dining-room with its well-curtained windows and brightly-burning fire—how I longed to have just such a comfortable nook to go to! But I never entered this cosy room; the occupier thought herself of too great importance to strike an acquaintance with the tenant of the garret; nor did the other old lady, who had the next two floors, think it compatible with her dignity to exchange even a few words with another solitary being. I never spoke to either tenant during the whole of the six months I passed in that house; if I met either of them on the stairs she would rush into her room and slam the door in my face! The further one went up the house the colder it got, and in my room the temperature was much the same as outside. To get a little warmth I used to fill a hot-water bottle with boiling water, heated by my spirit lamp, and put it on the floor or on my bed, which I used as a sofa, where I could put my feet on it; then I would cover my shoulders with my fur cloak and my knees with an eider down quilt. In this way I read, and worked, and thought on all cold days. The thoughts were suited to the circumstances. How long the winter seemed to be! Would it never come to an end? I had never noticed winter coming or going before; to me it had always meant brisk walks with my pupils, skating, and even tobogganing, in the daytime; and in the evenings blazing fires, plenty of nice books, long talks and merry games. How often I recalled those winters as I sat in my garret! Then I would pull myself up and try to persuade myself that things would be brighter soon; why should I not soon be earning an ample income with which I could command a comfortable home? “Till now,” thought I, “my services have been appreciated and well paid for, and they will be again. My eight years of experience and continued study have made me more valuable; I have my diploma and some certificates, besides the most excellent references, and I know that my teaching is worth the best terms paid for such services. I shall soon obtain a few pupils, and more will quickly follow beyond doubt.”

Thus I comforted myself, at first; and I set diligently about making known my requirements. Three times a week I advertised in the *Times* and the *Morning Post*; two or three times a week I called on certain agents and at Queen's College, Harley

Street, to examine the lists of those requiring lessons ; I got incorporated to the Teachers' Guild, and wrote many letters to my friends. Days, weeks and months passed by, and nothing came of all my trouble ! Somehow nobody seemed to require tuition, except a few persons who offered terms like two shillings a lesson and who lived in distant suburbs which would take several hours and half the fee to get to and from.

I received one promising reply to one of my advertisements. I happened to be staying for a few days with the kind people with whom I lived six years. The name sounded good and the address was that of one of the finest houses in Kensington ; I afterwards found they were people of very good standing and of great wealth. Well, I took the very first train the next morning, although I was ill with violent neuralgia ; but it was to me a matter of so much importance that I could not allow myself to remain in bed. I reached the house at eleven o'clock, and was immediately ushered into an elegant boudoir. As I entered a Frenchman came out, evidently the cook, with his *menu* in his hand. This augured well : at any rate there would be no difficulty here in arranging terms. The lady was extremely well dressed, and the house was most tastefully decorated and furnished, so far as I could judge by the hall, the dining-room—which I had seen *en passant*—and the boudoir.

As soon as I was seated she explained to me that she had a very intelligent daughter just fifteen years old—at which I rejoiced inwardly, seeing her already my pupil—and that she desired her to have advanced lessons in literature, history, arithmetic, and so on. I said it was exactly such tuition which I was most qualified to give.

She went on to say she would require me to come to the house for the whole of each day, or rather from ten till five, and that she would give £40 a year ! I almost jumped off my chair at these words. I pointed out to her, as well as my disgust would permit, that I could not support myself on forty pounds a year, and a moment later found myself in the street. I was profoundly depressed as I sat in the train on my way back to my kind and generous friends, and I thought bitterly of all the trouble and expense I had incurred, only to receive a slap in the face, so to speak. Forty pounds *a year* ! I wondered if the French cook contented himself with such a pittance. And to offer a lady who was to form the mind and heart of a growing girl less than a mere cook seemed to me atrocious. I wondered if that lady could even dress herself on forty pounds a year. Perhaps if somebody were to ask her such a question she would think it absurd, or feel insulted. And how can a governess live and dress like a lady, or even at all, on forty pounds a year ? Why, it would scarcely pay for my room and some food. As it was I deprived myself of fires, except when absolutely necessary for

cooking purposes, and took neither tea nor coffee; bread, and porridge and milk, with a box of sardines once a week, formed my principal foods at that time, as I only allowed myself eight shillings a week for food. For the life of me I could not see how I could live and find even needles and cotton, to say nothing of clothing, on forty pounds a year.

When three months had passed away in fruitless search I began to realize that the moment would soon be present when I should not have one penny left. All my advertisements, agents' fees, and expenses of living and travelling here and there seeking engagements had sorely diminished my funds, and my thirty pounds had dwindled down to five!

I shudder still when I think of those times. The long solitary days, mostly so cold and bitter, and my constant disappointments, had made sad havoc with my good spirits. I became terribly depressed and listless, and when my last five pounds had to be drawn upon I became so oppressed with the idea that I should soon be penniless, that I used to wake regularly in the middle of the night with a horrible sensation of being completely destitute. If I were to fall ill I could not pay to be nursed even at a hospital. Thoughts like these troubled me even in my sleep; it was horrible, horrible.

In those sad days how I sympathized with the many wretched creatures I saw in the streets—the poor, the blind, the lame, and the hungry. My heart positively bled for those people; and I could do absolutely nothing for them.

What a blessed thing it is to have means! And yet how often those who have them do not enough appreciate them, not having known the bitterness of poverty, and do not learn what intense happiness it is to help poor unfortunate creatures devoid of everything.

How often I longed to ask poor women, pale and sad, offering some trifle or other for sale, what ailed them; to find out where they lived, and to try to put them in the way of more profitable occupation. Or men I saw in the streets, unemployed, sullen and dogged looking—how I would like to have asked what were their circumstances, and to have helped them. Alas, I could not even help myself; how could I help others? There was a poor old Frenchman who came once or twice a week into the street where I lived. He generally came late in the evening. I used to hear him cough and then he would begin some old French song, very sad and plaintive in itself and still more so as he sang it; then he would attempt to render the martial strains of the "*Marseillaise*"—which certainly had nothing martial about them coming from that feeble old man who had to stop between nearly every bar to cough. Poor man; how came he there? If one had but a few pounds to spare to send him home to his native village and support him through his few remaining years! He came every day

of the six months I was there. Often his voice was so feeble and his cough so terrible that it was wonderful to me that he kept alive till the summer.

Many others besides my poor old countryman passed through that street wailing out their discordant and pitiful songs, especially on Sundays, when there were few carriages passing and the street was quieter. Oh, what a noisy street it was throughout the week! At first I thought I liked it—it gave one a pleasant sense of movement and life; but in a few days I began to think the milkmen and costermongers rather a nuisance; after the first week I regarded them as torments!

At seven in the morning the street was simply invaded by milkmen. I never could understand why these men give forth the fiendish screams peculiar to them. There was one youth among those who passed down our street who seemed to enjoy his vocal exercises wonderfully. Before each house, whether he had to stop or not, he gave three fearful shrieks, which I suppose meant “milk.” I used to hear him in the next square and as far as two streets away, and I really dreaded his coming. How I wished his voice would break! But not at all: his daily practice improved it—or rather increased the strength of it. As a rule a rival milkman would enter the street before the vigorous youth got out of it. Then it was perfectly awful! They redoubled their efforts in the attempt to outdo each other. If the milk cries had been but for a few minutes, the torture would have been more bearable perhaps; but they went on each morning until they were drowned by those of the costermongers. The “three-pence a quart” man who came between nine and ten was generally the last of these gentry. He used to emit a kind of jodeling ending with “yach—tun.” The last syllable he always took on a very high note, on which he seemed to linger with especial delight and affection. And all this caterwauling began again in the afternoon. From about eight in the morning till ten at night the postman’s loud double knock was heard at intervals of about two hours. But one easily forgave him—for at any moment his tat-tap might herald a welcome letter. But he was not the last to banish quiet in this unfortunate street—for soon after ten the hot-potatoe men began their rounds! I declare I never see one of their strangely constructed vehicles without a bitter pang of remembrance passing through me. Somehow or other these unfortunate carts seem to have concentrated in themselves almost every feature suggestive of poverty and destitution. The cries of “all hot and floury”—or rather, “all ’ot an’ flowry”—in a minor key, as these men utter them, play the same part as certain flowers and perfumes do in other cases—they remind one vividly of bygone scenes.

As the street happened to be a short cut between Belgravia and South Kensington, there was an unusually large road traffic

through it, and consequently there was a rumbling noise without cessation, from early morning till late at night—or rather I should say from morn till morn, for cabs and carriages seemed to be using it all through the night. Then there was a fire engine station hard by, and it seemed to me that very few nights passed without my being awakened by the shouts of the firemen and the noise of engine and horses as they rushed away to some distant fire. But I didn't mind that so very much, and always rushed to my window to catch sight of them if I heard them in time; for it was a thrilling sight to see the well-trained horses flying down the road, with the engine hissing like a monster behind them breathing fire and smoke, and scattering a shower of bright sparks in its trail; and one could have no thoughts but those of admiration for the band of stalwart firemen in their glimmering helmets, as they were swept past on their way to strife and danger.

I have forgotten to mention the instrumental performances we were treated to each day! They were innumerable. I should say that no instrument was unrepresented in that street. From the piano organ to the bagpipe, from the concertina to the horn, every conceivable instrument broke the peace more or less often. When there were intervals of rest from single-handed performers it was generally due to some German band, or group of Scotch sword-dancers with pipers having monopolized the street.

In moderation, I rather enjoy a good band, or a piano organ, or even a bagpipe—but a little of either goes a long way, especially of the last-named; a few minutes once a month is quite sufficient for me. I am told that in the midst of Scotch scenery one can thoroughly enjoy the bagpipe; that may be so; but between houses in an over-crowded street, it always sounds to me as if there was something wrong about it.

But what always made me feel very miserable were the frequent sights of whole families passing slowly down the streets singing hymns—the father carrying a small child in his arms, the mother with a baby in hers, and beside them two or three miserably-clad children. It was wretched! The children would chime in every now and then with their poor shrill voices, and stare wistfully up at the windows on either side as they crept along step by step. Poor little things! I used to wonder whether their parents were doing this kind of thing only in an exceptional way, from hunger and want of work; or if they were taking it up as a regular occupation. Whichever it may have been it was inexpressibly sad. These groups were most noticeable on Sundays, the traffic was so much less then.

And oh, those Sundays! They were terrible days for me. I stopped my usual occupations then and I used to sit for hours together wrapped in my cloak reading or writing—but somehow there was no enjoyment about it; I could not shake off the dul-

ness of the day. My solitary meals seemed to choke me, and I longed for some lady to talk to. How hard the conditions under which a woman has to earn her own living are, compared with those which surround a man. To work is in itself a pleasure, of course; it is the lonely position it often involves, to a woman, which makes her life so unenviable when she is "earning her own living." A man more often works in company with his fellows, and can always spend his evening at his club or with his companions; he can frequent his pet restaurant, his favourite theatres and music halls, or any place his fancy selects, where he can make and meet friends and acquaintances. How different must be the woman's life. No merry chats and funny stories, no jokes and pleasant pastimes for her. She has her one room, and in it she is expected to pass her leisure hours. When she comes in after her day's work she lights her fire (if she can afford one), prepares her meal and struggles through it as a mere matter of business, and perhaps stares dreamily into the fire the while. What does she see in the dancing flames? Not often can she build pleasant castles from them; more likely the chilling thought that as it is this year, so will it be next, and, if she lives, so will it be five, ten, twenty years hence! Her thoughts are apt to run into grooves too sad to allow her to remain unoccupied and resting, and she forces herself to read, write, or sew, until her watch shows bed time has come; and then, longing for morning to come, when she may work again and shake off her torpor for a time, she essays to sleep. As there are many thousands of women working for daily bread under conditions like these, how great a boon it would be if some nice places could be built containing suitable apartments, in which large numbers could live under one roof and have suitable attendance provided. There is a set of buildings in Oakley Street, Chelsea, which answers to this description—but it is like a drop in the ocean. Many more such places are wanted, for there are thousands of women in London who would gladly avail themselves of such advantages, instead of having to do everything for themselves and wasting their sixpences and shillings on all sides in paying for every little service done for them.

One morning, when I was occupied cleaning potatoes and carrots and thinking sadly of my dwindling sovereigns, the servant entered my room to tell me a lady was down stairs and wanted to speak to me. I quickly covered my vegetables with a newspaper and rushed down stairs to show her up. She told me she lived quite near and had seen my advertisement, and would I give lessons to her daughter?

There was no unwillingness on my part! My late experiences had made me careful about setting up expectations which might not be realized. But this time I need not have repressed them, for we agreed on terms at once and I was to begin in three weeks'

time. I wished it could have been at once, but there was no choice. Very soon after that lady procured me two other good pupils and I was—saved! It was not an income sufficient for my needs, but it would help me toward one, and my heart was grateful indeed. The weather was getting warmer too, and sometimes the sun shone into the house in strong hot rays, such as that winter had not known. How delightful it was to feel the warm rays falling on me when I passed the staircase window outside my room—my window did not face the sun, so I got none of the glory in my room. I used to open wide the staircase window and my door to get in as much as I could of the warm fresh air, and altogether I began to breathe freely again.

One evening when I returned from one of the classes I attended at South Kensington School of Art, the servant informed me in an imperative tone that Mrs. Peters—she was the landlady—would be pleased if I did not touch the window on the stairs as the lady on the first floor complained of draughts, and Mrs. Peters had a bad cold.

“Well,” said I, “will you kindly tell Mrs. Peters that I am sorry she has a cold, but I am sure the fresh air on the third floor cannot possibly hurt her in the basement, and I do not think the lady on the first floor can feel any draught from an open window on the third floor.”

“Ah, but the lady on the first floor is very particular, because she suffers dreadfully of rheumatics.”

“I am sorry for that of course,” I said, “but sunny fresh air can hurt nobody. Besides I have some right to be considered as well as she, and I object to having all the bad air rising from the bottom of the house to my room when I can have fresh air instead.”

“Very well, miss. I shall tell her.”

In the end I gained my point; but from that time Mrs. Peters turned sulky toward me. I thought she would be all right in a few days. But oh, dear no! For the next three months she never once put her foot inside my room, and she avoided me as if I had been a pestilence. Evidently I had offended her terribly in opposing my desires to her commands. I thought her temper quite a peculiar one; apparently she thought she had a right to it, but did not reckon on my having one too.

She paid me out though. I sometimes bought fresh herrings for my supper and got them broiled in the kitchen according to our little agreement. The sand in the fish rather lessened my enjoyment sometimes, but I considered it a dainty food on the whole. One day the servant said, “Mrs. Peters is very sorry, but the herring fell in the cinders,” and uncovered the dish. There was my herring, all broken up and burnt. I tried to eat some and found my mouth full of what I had always taken for sand. After that I tried herrings a few more times, but they some-

how always fell into the cinders, and I had to give them up and rest content with bread and butter. I thought of Tantalus' punishment—there I had my fish, my appetite was excited by its delicate fragrance and yet I could not eat it.

After May had passed into June, and the discomforts of the cold winter had passed away, with the advent of milder temperature I began to feel quite at home in my room, notwithstanding the sandy herrings. I had got accustomed to hard fare, and could more easily accommodate myself to circumstances than I could at first. In June the weather became unusually warm, and then I found that my garret was quite as hot in summer as it had been cold in winter; and, being near the roof, the room scarcely had time to cool at night before the sun was blazing out again in the morning and at once making the place like an oven again. I liked it at first, it was so pleasant compared with the months before, but it had a bad effect upon my health; I became very weak and nervous, and could hardly drag myself from one place to another. Fortunately I was not then without friends. The lady in whose house I lived six years was in town and looked after me like a mother would have done; and a great friend of hers came with her daughter to see me, and invited me to her house often and showed me much kindness. Then, too, I discovered one day that the people who lived next door to me were old friends of mine. We chanced to meet in the street, and of course renewed our acquaintance. They too were very kind to me, and I spent many hours with them in the warm summer evenings. It was a great comfort to me to feel that if I got weaker and could not leave my bed I should not now be entirely at the mercy of strangers.

But though I made new and dear friends I did not get any more pupils. All my friends were looking out for me, but their efforts were in vain, so far as any immediate result was concerned. It seemed as though all the children requiring tuition had disappeared as by magic. And then every one was so busy in connection with the Jubilee festivities, and all the ladies seemed to spend enormous sums to get seats to view the procession from, and so no doubt they did not care to pay for lessons for their children just then. I am heartily glad that there will not be another Jubilee in my time.

I got so weak and feeble that I was thankful that holiday time was near. I wondered how I could set aside money enough to pay my expenses to the houses I had been invited to pass my holidays in. One day I suddenly remembered that I had once lent a sum of money to a friend of mine. I wrote a letter at once (which fortunately reached her) asking if she could let me have it back as it would be of very great service to me. Happily for me she sent it to me immediately, and I was enabled to start on my holidays with an easy mind.

How glad I was to leave that house. I took all my things away with me as I could not afford to keep on the room in my absence, and moreover had no intention of returning to a house in which I had suffered so much. When I came back to London after my holidays I settled myself in the garret I occupy now. It is of course next the roof, and it has only one window and no fire-place at all. This sounds worse than the description of my former abode. Ah, yes; but it is a nicely furnished room and has a good bed, the window fastens properly and faces the afternoon sun—a great point with me—and the street is a quiet one, though to be sure there is the Metropolitan District Railway on the other side of the house. There is a little oil stove in the room to warm the air, but it gave out such a terrible stench the first time I lighted it (not having been cleaned for some months) that I had to open the window to get some fresh air in, and found myself with a terrible cold in a day or two. I had the stove properly cleaned and found it more bearable, but the warmth is very sickly and cannot be healthy, so that I have not used it since the first week I came, when the weather happened to be cold. I daresay I shall move again if I find another room as nice as this one and *with* a fire-place, but for the present I am disinclined to look for one. There is no cooking done in this house, so I have to get all my meals sent in from a restaurant close by, but with my little spirit lamp I can make myself hot tea at any time. To my intense surprise I feel perfectly content here; I suppose I am hardened, and I daresay I am approaching my ideal Diogenes, and that to live next in a tub will not in the least disconcert me. The idea of furnishing two rooms I have given up long since as the last of my illusions, and I have made up my mind never to aspire to anything more comfortable than what I am now in possession of.

“SAVED!”

THE COUNTESS OF MUNSTER.

“*AHI! La bella signorina! e pallidetta! e stanca! poverina!*”

These words were addressed to me years ago by the *padrona* of a hotel, which my mother and I had just reached, after a long and fatiguing night journey; and trivial as they may appear, I remember them distinctly, as well as every other circumstance that occurred during the eventful four and twenty hours which succeeded our arrival at the Hotel d'Oro, in Florence, on the 17th September, 184—.

My lately-widowed mother and myself (a girl of seventeen) had been travelling in Italy for months, after an aimless, erratic fashion; for she, poor soul, was endeavouring, through change of scene and fatigue of body, to deaden the memory of her grief; and we had started the night before from A——, to avoid the heat of a day journey, arriving in the early morning at the Hotel d'Oro, an imposing building situated on the banks of the Arno, and formerly a palace of the Este and Borgia families, whose quaint monograms and devices ornamented its walls, both within and without.

We were conducted to our apartments by the pretty *padrona*, and as we wearily passed through the magnificent vestibule and ascended the broad marble staircase, I was curiously reminded (my nerves being probably in an irritated condition) of a picture I had seen in a child's story book, of a pretty little girl with long hair, who is mounting a stair leading to a hanging gallery, so exactly like the one before us, that as we came to an abrupt turn, I positively stopped and shuddered, expecting to be met (as in the picture) by a cruel-faced, velvet-footed panther, which was waiting round the corner, with open mouth and glaring eye, to spring upon its unsuspecting victim! A silly childish story, no doubt, but just one of those which would cling to one's memory.

The visitors' apartments on the first *piano* of the Hotel d'Oro opened upon the hanging gallery, and we were conducted to ours through a doorway concealed by a heavy piece of tapestry.

“Is the *signora* satisfied?” asked the *padrona*, as with pardonable pride she threw open the door of a spacious and beautiful *salone*, which owned French windows, opening upon a delightfully roomy balcony.

“Oh, yes,” answered my mother wearily; “but pray take us at once to our sleeping rooms, for we are very tired.”

The *padrona* took the hint, and led us to two rooms (leading out of the *salone* and into each other), which were beautifully furnished, but one was so small that I indignantly exclaimed, “Mamma! I really can't sleep in a *box*!—and in this heat too!”

“ Have you any other room you could give Lady Muriel ? ” my mother asked the *padrona*, who reflected for a moment and then said:

“ I have, *signora*. It belongs to a suite of rooms prepared for the Russian Princess Lipetska and her sick son and attendants, whom we expect in a few hours ; but the doctor, who engaged them, desired us to shut up three or four of the bedrooms, as there were too many ; so Lady Muriel’s maid could sleep there also—close to her—just across the gallery.”

My mother said, “ If you are sure you have a right to give her these rooms, that will do perfectly.” So all being satisfactorily arranged, I betook myself to my apartment, accompanied by the *padrona* ; but when first I entered it, my spirits (generally daring to a fault) went down to zero. The room was so large ! So gloomy ! The walls were hung with dingy tapestry, which trembled and flapped each time a door was shut, or that one walked across the room ; making the grotesque and hideous figures represented upon it, seemingly instinct with life and with an agony of eagerness to leap from the walls, and proffer me a dreadful welcome ! The bed, too, was far from reassuring in its ghost-like grandeur. It was a carved oak “ four-poster ; ” an ivory and ebony crucifix was nailed at its head, the curtains were dark green velvet, and plumes of feathers waved at each corner of the canopy, being constantly stirred by mysterious gusts of air, and emitting a rustling sound suggestive of dead leaves—melancholy in the extreme. Added to all this I counted five doors in the room, and the *padrona* noticing my uneasy glances towards them, assured me they were locked, proving her words by pushing and pulling them violently while turning the handles, at the same time talking volubly in Italian. I was, of course, obliged, after the good lady’s exertions, to profess myself satisfied, and she was just leaving the room, when the bell which hung in the court-yard began to ring, and the *padrona*, running with apologies to my balcony, which overhung the grand entrance, called out hastily :

“ Lady Muriella ! *Vede ! Ecco la principessa ed il principe ! guarda !* ” and then hurried downstairs. I ran and looked out, and true enough, the Russians had arrived, hours before they were expected, and with much curiosity I watched them as they alighted. There were several clumsy vehicles, each drawn by three horses ; the princess and her lady occupying the first. The princess was helped out of her carriage by two footmen (the exact counterpart of each other,) having greasy Kalmuc faces, flat noses, and eyes *à la chinoise*, and she seemed tall and finely formed, with a clear, pale complexion, tawny-coloured hair and eyelashes, (the latter being unusually thick and long) and she walked with singular dignity as she entered the hotel.

The occupants of the second vehicle, (a sort of invalid carriage) greatly interested me. First a priest, with lowering face and

shovel hat, and who had seemingly descended from one of the carriages at the rear, entered the bed-carriage, and proceeded to hand out a bag, some pillows, and a fur rug; then giving a sign to the footmen, they scrambled up the carriage steps like performing monkeys, and slowly and carefully drew forth the long, lanky legs of a boy of about sixteen, whose shoulders and head were supported by a serious-looking young man, who I subsequently learnt was an English doctor. The young prince seemed very ill, for he neither spoke nor moved, and took no notice of any one. I was eager to see his face, but both doctor and priest were determined he should not be exposed to the vulgar gaze, for his cap was pulled over his eyes, and his figure was enveloped in a large shawl; but as he was being disengaged from the carriage, his head fell backward, and his cap slipped off, and in his anxiety to catch it, one of the servants entangled his foot in the shawl, dragging it completely off; and although the priest hastily replaced it and the cap, (casting meanwhile a withering look at the terrified menial), he did not prevent my having a momentary view of the thin face and emaciated figure of the sick boy. He was deadly pale, his eyes were closed, and he appeared unconscious of all around; till, strangely, and for an instant, (during the excitement caused by the loss of his cap), I fancied he slightly opened his eyes—and looked at me! but he was carried so quickly into the hotel that I could not be certain of the fact.

I felt no further interest in the occupants of the other carriages, but I longed to see all I could of the prince and his strange *entourage*; so I crept into the gallery overlooking the marble hall, and waited; knowing that as his apartments were next to mine, the prince must pass that way.

As I leant over the gallery balustrade, watching, I fancied there seemed some delay, some consternation in the hall, amongst the attendants, but I was too far off to make out the cause; at last, however, I saw them coming, carrying the prince up the stair, upon a stretcher. As soon as they had nearly reached the landing, I ran back and hid myself behind my own door, to see them go by.

It was quite a procession. First came the princess (how beautiful she was, and how arrogant she looked!), and by her side was the priest, talking in low, agitated whispers, while she appeared to listen in proud, sullen silence. Then the seemingly inanimate body was carried by, by the doctor (whose face was deathly pale) and some servants. As the prince and his bearers passed, I involuntarily moved out of my hiding place, and the doctor perceiving me, started slightly, and again I thought the sick boy's heavy eyelids quivered and slightly unclosed! He was followed by a troop of dirty, savage-looking servants, who chattered noisily in some guttural tongue as they walked, until the priest turned and frowned them into silence.

All excitement being now over, I lay down and endeavoured to sleep, but my mind would not rest; so after tossing about uneasily for an hour or two, I rose and ran into my mother, and as I was relating to her all I had seen, the *padrona* knocked and anxiously craved an interview; and began a long story, speaking so rapidly in Italian that I could not understand her, but my mother, being a good linguist, did, and was evidently deeply interested in what she heard; gradually, however, a look of horror overspread her face, and finally pointing at me, she put her finger upon her lip, a gesture which apprised me, of course, that something was going forward which I was not to know, and which, equally of course, decided me upon discovering what that “something” was; so losing no time, I ran to my maid Susette, who was arranging my room, and asked what had happened. At first she refused to tell me, increasing my curiosity a hundred-fold, by adding “the *padrona* had begged her to be silent.” Eventually the French woman’s love of gossip, got the upper hand, and with many nods and winks and “hushes,” she confided to me that the young prince was—dead!

“Dead!” I gasped.

“Yes, dead!” reiterated Susette. She then proceeded to say that the young man had been so ill during the journey, that the doctor doubted his arriving alive, but the prince had such a longing to get to Florence that they hurried on. The doctor insisted upon travelling alone with his patient (great care and quiet being indispensable); but when they arrived within a few miles of Florence, the prince was taken so suddenly worse, that the carriages were stopped, and the doctor called in the priest, considering death imminent; the invalid lived, however, to be lifted into the hotel, but as he was being carried through the marble hall, the doctor called out to the bearers to stop, and before the poor fellow could be placed upon a couch—he expired.

I was too awe-stricken to speak; but when my astonishment had in a measure subsided, I began to reason, and I said to Susette:

“Who told you this?”

“The *padrona*,” answered the maid.

“Did she see it happen?”

“No,” said Susette, “for the princess begged the *padrone* and his wife to stay behind, and superintend the unloading of the carriages, so that the prince’s luggage might be brought up at once. The *dame de compagnie* told the *padrona* how it all occurred, and she told me.”

“Well!” I exclaimed excitedly, “it is a very odd story, for I saw the young prince’s face twice, and he looked exactly the same both times, very pale and quiet, but not dead.”

“Hush! Lady Muriel,” whispered Susette, “do not speak so loud, for the *padrona*, in the hurry and distress of the arrival, did not mention to the princess that you were in this room; she told the doctor——”

“And what did he say?” I asked quickly.

"He seemed put out at first, and said he feared the princess would be displeased, but when the padrona told him that you were 'only a *signorina*,' he seemed satisfied."

"And you allowed me to stay all this time in a room to which I had no right," I exclaimed hotly (my dignity being hurt also, at being considered a nonentity). "How could you do so? I shall go at once to mamma, and——"

"Wait, Lady Muriel," interrupted Susette; "I will see the *padrona*, when she can attend to us; at present they are all in such trouble about the prince's death."

"I do not believe he *is* dead, for as he passed me I am almost sure he opened his eyes and looked at me!"

"People's eyes are often half open when they are dead," said Susette.

"May be," I argued; "but people don't open their eyes after they *are* dead."

"Ah! bah!" said Susette irritably, annoyed at her story being doubted, "the prince is dead now, at all events, for I stood by while you were lying down, and I saw crosses, tapers, pictures, and all kinds of things being carried into his room; and, the doctor saw me, and came up hastily to me, and said he had not yet told the princess that you slept in that room, and that I had better keep it quiet at present. Then he asked who you were? How old? Whether you slept alone? and then he asked me to do him a favour, for he could not, he said, leave the room for a moment himself, so would I fetch one of the footmen, Ivan by name, as he must tell him to go out and buy flowers for the death chamber; so I fetched him, and on my return the doctor put a gold piece in my hand and said, as he could not speak Italian, he might want my help again." I would not answer Susette, and I told her to leave me, for I was annoyed at getting mixed up with the Russians, angry too with the doctor for offering money to my maid, and still more angry with her for taking it; then—what could he mean, saying he *might* want Susette's help again? Surely there were Russians enough to do their own behests.

"There is something strange about it all," I soliloquized, "and I hate these Russians—I don't know why—and I will not remain amongst them; I will move into 'the box' at once." Having thus lashed myself into a state of high wrath, I burst out of my room into the passage, and to my unspeakable annoyance, I ran up against the priest, who, (with the princess,) was standing at my door. I murmured, "Pardon!" and would have passed on, but the princess, looking amazed at my appearance, came forward and said civilly, "Ah! pretty Lady Muriel, I heard you were in the hotel; have you lost your way? the galleries are all so alike. Shall I conduct you back to your room? Where do you sleep?"

"Here, madame," I said rather defiantly, pointing to my room, determined to show that I had nothing to hide.

The lady looked surprised, but quickly recovering herself said :
 "Ah! so near us! You are in the midst of much sorrow."

"The young prince," I said awkwardly, "how is he?"

"Ah! you do not know; he is dead, alas!"

I had not time to reply, for the priest, who had been watching me intently, came forward and whispered in the princess's ear, upon which she said to me :

"Would you like to see my poor son—yourself?"

I hesitated—for I had never seen death—but I was curious, very curious, and the princess, seeing my hesitation, took me firmly by the hand, and opening the door of her apartments, led me in.

For a moment I was perfectly dazed at what met my sight! The room was large, and in utter darkness, except immediately round the couch upon which the dead prince lay, and there, innumerable candles of all sizes were blazing like a fiery barrier defending him from the outer world. The doctor was standing close to the body, burning some condiment, which he held in a dish; he looked steadily at me, and gently drew down the white coverlet (which shrouded the whole figure) from off the head and upper portion of the body, so that I might see the sad, but beautiful face, which was as white as the roses and camellias which surrounded it. The hair, eyebrows and eyelashes were very black, and the pale, slender fingers were lightly crossed over a crucifix which rested on the breast. I gazed tearfully at the pathetic young face, which seemed hardly, if at all, changed.

"How exquisite!" I sighed, "and how quickly everything has been arranged! May I go nearer?"

"Yes," answered the princess, "but not within the lights; but—how pale you are! You had better stay no longer."

"There is such a strange, sweet smell, which rather overcomes me."

"Ah! from the violets and Cape jessamine; we can none of us stay in the room; but you *are* so pale! You must come away." Then putting her handkerchief up to her eyes, she added, "He will be buried to-morrow; they bury so quickly here."

"Poor boy!" I ejaculated, and burst into tears.

"You will tell Madame la Comtesse," said the princess, "how calm, how happy he looks, and that we have had a devoted English doctor all through; he is here now, you see; and he will not leave Michael's room, even to eat."

I looked at the doctor as she spoke, and fancied I saw the ghost of a smile flit over his face, and not feeling kindly disposed towards him, I said to myself, "Heartless, like all the rest," then turning to the princess, I said coldly :

"I will tell my mother that I have seen you, madame, and your poor son, but," I added hesitatingly, "*does* he look calm and happy? Is there not—rather—a look of *fear* upon his face?"

The princess answered shortly, "Perhaps you have never seen death before?"

"No, madame," I returned; "but if all dead faces look as beautiful, as full of pathos as this one, "why should people ever dread seeing them?" With this I courtesied ceremoniously to the princess and left her, and after hastily dressing for a drive, I joined my mother and related to her all I had seen and heard. My mother was rather startled when she heard my account; but seeing I had sustained no nerve shock, she only said:

"I hope, darling, the young man died of nothing infectious?"

"Oh, no, mamma; he has been ill for a long time; the princess told me so."

"I wish she had not spoken to you, Muriel; I begged the *padrona* to tell you nothing about it, for fear of alarming you. I hope the room you sleep in is not next the prince's, or you will be frightened."

"It takes a great deal to alarm me, mamma," I said evasively and with a contemptuous laugh; so, after this conversation, I resolved to say nothing about my wish to move, for I was foolishly vain of my reputation for coolness and courage, and I felt sure, were I now to express a wish to change my room, it would be endangered; so setting aside my dignity, I deemed it best to leave the distribution of the rooms as it was.

A short time afterwards we started on a sight-seeing expedition, and after a cosy little dinner and a short rest on the balcony, we retired for the night. I was quickly undressed, and after Susette had left me, as I thought, for good, she returned, saying her room was so small, might she hang her bonnet and cloak, &c., in the recess within mine, which had been devoted to the carriage boxes? I was still too put out with her either to object or agree to anything she might propose; in fact, I felt that as long as she left me personally in peace, she might hang herself up there on a peg till the morning, without any let or hindrance from me! So she did as she wished, and after replacing the *portière* over the recess, she once more left me, this time locking my door on the outside and carrying off the key, as my mother (rather against my will) had desired her to do, for fear I should forget to lock my door myself. Susette had also received orders to come to me once or twice during the night, in case I should require anything. So I now settled myself in bed, and tried to sleep, but in vain, for either from over-fatigue, or excitement, or both, I was restless, uneasy, and tossed wearily from side to side. After a while, however, I gradually calmed down, becoming drowsy and confused; and all the sights and sounds I had passed through during the day revisited me, but in a misty, indistinct way, as though I saw and heard them through a veil; half-waking, half-dreaming, strange fancies, interwoven with the impressions of the last few hours, haunted my pillow. First, I was standing in the great marble hall, in the midst of which I saw a *catafalque*, surrounded by a mass of light, and upon it lay the pale young

prince, while at his feet crouched a spotted leopard, upon whose broad back a lovely little girl, (with long rippling hair,) was sitting, and they two were keeping watch over the dying boy, so that none of those black figures which were lurking behind the marble pillars dare approach. I passed on, I thought, through the hall, which was thickly strewn with roses, violets and the luscious gardenia, and as, at each step, I crushed the flowers, a sweet, faint, overpowering odour seemed to rise higher and higher, till it enveloped me in a diaphanous mist, opaque at first, but gradually melting away, so as to make me dimly aware that I was standing on a fascinating fairy-built bridge, dreamily watching the waters of the silver Arno, which laughingly hurried by, casting up a glittering shower of diamonds, rubies and emeralds, and refusing to be retained by the graceful arches which would fain have clasped them to their stony breasts. Then unconsciously the scene shifted, and I was walking through a narrow Italian street, closely surrounded by grim-looking, grey stone palaces, with their narrow-barred, vindictive-looking windows and their frowning towers; and I seemed to distinguish beneath my feet the hollow sounds of their dreadful dungeons: "And each and all these," a priest whispered in my ear, "have their own tale of wrong and murder!" At these words I thought I hastened my steps, for I felt suffocated, stifled for want of air; the streets seemed interminable, and the buildings as though they would close over my head, when lo! a holy, lovely Presence was near, and coming towards me was a young Mother, pressing Her little child close to Her bosom, as though clasping Him fast to shield Him from the cruel outer world. "Is it a beauteous picture?" I asked in a confused way, "or is it a great Truth?" for a glory shone forth from the baby brow, clearing away the wicked shadows, and shedding light and blessing on all around! Fountains, flowers, gardens, statues, now passed giddily before me, glowing and glistening in the pitiless burning sun, with unchanging blue sky overhead, and the glaring white flagstones under foot; till at last, languid and fainting, I turned gratefully out of the noise and heat, into a dim-lit, high-roofed cathedral, restful alike to eyes and mind in its darkness and silence. (That peculiar, holy, church silence, which always tells of a great Expectancy, of the hushed and breathless "looking for" a great and glorious Coming!) I stood, I thought, entranced, gazing mistily at the beauty of the opal-jewelled windows, at the wondrous perspective of the many arches, "raised" (I said to myself) "like huge sheltering arms, guarding over the Present of my childish head, and stretching far, far away (always lifted in my defence) into the shadows of the Future." As I gazed above, I beheld two angels come hovering side by side, down the lofty cathedral aisle, and with each beat of their pearly wings they shed around them the fragrant odours of incense, and the vibrations of a mystic melody. They smiled as

they passed me by, a grave sweet smile, and I said dreamily; "Oh! that this House of Peace were my home! Oh! that I could for ever join in the service of angels!" Then, in fancy, I knelt and mingled my poor prayers with those of the calm, holy-looking nuns, the wrinkled old peasant women, the dark-eyed, brown-skinned children that were kneeling reverently on the marble pavement, peacefully telling their beads, apparently all unconscious of a busily-wicked, wickedly-busy Florence within a few paces of their altars—aye! at their very church doors!

These pictures, distinct at first, but becoming gradually more and more shadowy, were all in a moment rudely dispersed, dispelled, exactly like a mirror which had suddenly been cracked, sparred by some unseen hand! I started violently, and sat up in my bed, for I thought—nay, I was convinced—I heard one of the many doors in the room shake gently, but decidedly, as though some one were endeavouring to enter. I listened attentively, and for a while all seemed quiet; but—again! the same sound! and this time from another door, which, like the former one, opened into the Russian apartments. I watched, and distinctly saw the handle turn and the door shake! I was now thoroughly alarmed, and would have rushed in to Susette, but, to my distress, I remembered that my door was locked on the outside!

"Oh!" I gasped, "if Susette would only come! What *can* it be? What *shall* I do?" I waited, listening painfully, but for a few minutes (which seemed ages to me) I heard nothing more, and almost persuaded myself that it must have been my imagination, or perhaps, "Some one may have mistaken the door." I thought I began to be ashamed of my cowardice; I determined to be brave, and ignore the whole thing,—to lie down again,—but I had hardly done so before I distinctly heard footsteps creeping along the balcony and stopping at my window,—which was only lightly hooked together, for it was very warm, and it had never struck me, till now, that as my room belonged to the Russian suite, so did the balcony, and was therefore not divided from theirs. Breathlessly I listened, and, tremblingly leaping out of bed, I threw on my dressing-gown,—stole to the window,—and, gently pushing aside the blind, looked out,—and never, to my dying day, shall I forget my horror when I became aware of a *man's face, within an inch of my own, peering in at me!*

Terror nearly paralyzed me, but did not prevent my recognizing in the coarse Kalmuc type of the intruder, the face of one of the Russian men-servants!

I could not move or scream,—but at a signal from the Russian, to my utter amaze and bewilderment, who should appear at his side but the "dead" prince! He was making imploring signs to me to be silent—not to be afraid, and, above all things, to let him in! The poor young face was so livid,—the eyes so strained with terror; the tears, too, were coursing so visibly down the

thin haggard cheeks, and the attitude was so touchingly humble and imploring, that my fright turned into pity, and I felt intuitively that in some mysterious way, I held the life, or death, of this trembling creature in my hands. Impelled, therefore, by the power of mercy, and hurriedly eager to save I knew not who, from I knew not what, I unhooked the window, and the prince crept noiselessly in! To my unspeakable relief the footman fell back, evidently on the watch, and the poor boy sank at my feet, gasping out in a mixture of languages, “ Oh, Lady Muriella, *pour l’amour de Dieu*, save me! Let me out at your door! ”

“ Good Heavens! ” I cried, “ it is locked on the outside! ”

“ Hide me, then, hide me! ” he sobbed,—as, in an agony of supplication, he clasped my gown. “ Your white *robe* and your *tête dorée* make you look like an *angiol di Dio*! Be one to me, Muriella, an *angiol protettore*! *Ecoutez*, the good doctor and poor Ivan have risked much. The doctor made me feign death, and he has drugged the *padre*, and watches him, but he will soon wake! Ah! save me from him, from *ma belle mère*. ”

“ I will do anything, ” I said excitedly; “ but what *can* I do? You cannot stay here. What are you afraid of? ”

“ Ah! get me out of the hotel, for— ” looking round in a terror-struck way, and whispering in my ear, “ they are—poisoning me! ”

“ Rouse the house! ” was my natural suggestion.

“ No, no, lady! *Ecoutez*! I have no time to explain, but flight is my only chance—to the English Embassy—Lord Queensland will help me, and—— ” At this moment the key turned slowly in my door, and I just had time to push the prince into the recess (while he implored me in a whisper to confide in “ no one—no one ”), when Susette appeared, sleepy, cross, and with a light.

“ I come, miladi, according to orders. Do you want anything? ”

“ Oh, Susette! I am so glad you are come. I really will not be locked in like this! it alarms me! for if anything were to happen I couldn’t get out. I must have the key. ”

“ Lady Muriel ” (with sleepy dignity) “ *madame* said I was to lock you in. But why ” (with curiosity)—“ why are you alarmed? Why are you up? ”

“ Because, I tell you, I don’t like being locked in! If mamma knew how it frightens me, she would of course let it be as I say. What is *that*? ” I added nervously; “ I am sure I heard a step outside my door! ”

“ It is only the *guardia*, miladi; he walks about all night and watches the galleries. ”

“ Did he see you? ” I asked anxiously.

“ Yes; and he asked where I was going. ”

“ Poor prince! ” I mentally ejaculated, “ there is little chance, then, of *your* getting out unseen. ” Then aloud I said to Susette, “ Give me the key. ” Susette was too sleepy to argue further upon the matter, so she delivered up the key, and I let her out

and locked the door. I waited to hear her departing footsteps, then I flew to the recess, and drew back the *portière* to liberate the prisoner; when, to my astonishment, the young man issued forth, clad from head to foot in Susette's clothes! No one could possibly have recognized him, for he had tied a thick veil over his face, and the metamorphosis was perfect. In spite of the awkward, nay, dangerous circumstances, I felt a strong inclination to laugh, but I said seriously:

“ Why do you not make a confidant of the *guardia*? Tell him your story, and get him to let you out at the front door.”

“ No, no! the doctor told me solemnly to trust to no one but you—no servants, for the *padre* always bribes the servants. Ah, Muriella, *que faire*? how shall I get out?”

“ I know,” I said joyfully, and dashing into the recess, I dragged forth a strong rope, used to cord boxes. “ You must get out by the balcony—it is not high; my brothers could almost let themselves drop without a rope, and I am sure I could.”

“ Ah! but I am ill, weak—faint.”

“ Well, well,” I said rather impatiently, with a touch of British arrogance and contempt for foreign chicken-heartedness; “ you stay in here, while I make preparations.” So I stepped on to the balcony. Ivan was standing a few yards off, watching the windows of the Russian apartments; and with a horrid shrinking, I saw the moon-beams play upon a naked knife he held in his hand! and then for the first time I fully realized how dearly he had resolved to sell his young master's liberty, and what a dangerous matter I was engaged in!

The Russian comprehended at a glance what was my design, for as I was tying the rope to the balcony, I suppose my hand trembled, for he came hurriedly forward and helped me, at the same time making signs that we had no time to lose. After fastening the rope firmly, he returned to his post of observation, and I softly called the young prince; then carefully looking into the road, to see there were no inconvenient passers-by, I whispered to him in true schoolboy phraseology, “ Now's your time!”

Taking the rope very gently from my hand, the young man seemed to pause,—looking meanwhile wistfully at me; then raising the veil which concealed his features, before I could prevent it, he threw his arms passionately round me, straining me tightly to his breast, and while murmuring the word “ Muriella!” he pressed his trembling lips once, twice, and yet again, fervently, almost painfully to mine, and with a great sob threw himself over the ironwork, slid down, and disappeared! The faithful Ivan now approached, and I was slightly nervous as to whether he might not deem it necessary to express his gratitude after the same fashion! but I need not have been alarmed, for after making an eager sign to me to lock my window, with a gesture of deep respect, he kissed the hem of my garment, slid down the rope, and was gone, and I was left standing there alone, with a half

inclination to slide down the rope and run away also ! However, I listened to the sound of the fugitives' retreating footsteps, and as they died in the distance I remembered Ivan's warning, and un-knotting the rope, I re-entered my room with it in my hand, then shutting, locking, and even barricading my window, I sat down for a moment to collect my thoughts.

My eyes wandered round the room, and ere my bewilderment had quite subsided, I perceived that a bunch of forget-me-nots which I had placed in water by my bedside was gone ! and blushing I told myself that, while waiting, the young prince must have stolen it. With this discovery tears, all unbidden, rushed to my eyes (for I was, after all, a very young girl) and a tender feeling sprang up in my heart for the individual for whom I had undoubtedly gone through a great deal ; and on my knees I thanked God for His help, and begged Him to raise up a stronger protector than myself to rid the prince of his enemies. This outburst of feeling, (hysterical, no doubt) relieved me, and once more I became practical, and I decided that courageous as I might be (and had undoubtedly proved myself) I dared no longer stay alone in that room ; for I feared the possibility (on the discovery of the prince's flight) of another visit from some of the Russians ; so opening the door softly, I let myself out, and, with a creeping sensation, as though all the Russians in the hotel were pursuing me, I fled towards Susette's room, and to my unspeakable relief met her coming towards me ! She was petrified at the *rencontre*, and drawing me into her room, asked anxiously what was the matter ? I told her breathlessly all that happened, and she said she had been struck by my pale, frightened face when she had seen me an hour ago ; and it had so haunted her, that she was now on her way to my room. She looked rather rueful when she heard of the loss of her clothes, but her womanly sympathy went out heartily to the poor boy when I described his terror and distress, and she forthwith began to consider how best to conceal the scene of his flight. I did not then understand that this was more for my sake than for that of the fugitives. (The “ bliss ” of ignorance was mine at that moment, the “ folly ” of wisdom came later.)

Susette returned at once with me to my bedroom, for the watchman, she said, had luckily seen her as she entered it an hour before, and he would think she had remained there all night, so we locked the door and lay down together. Not long after we had done so, we again heard footsteps on the balcony, and as the moon was shining brightly, we saw the shadow of a man pass quickly across the blind, and as it returned it lingered long enough at my window for me to recognize the spare form of the priest ! but finding, I suppose, that everything was unsuspectingly quiet, and the window closed, the figure vanished as cautiously as it had appeared ; and although we listened long and attentively, we heard nothing more. After a while my nervousness calmed

down, and Susette's propinquity giving me a sense of security, I fell asleep. The sun was shining brightly into the room as I awoke, and I overheard the *fille de chambre* tell Susette that the Russians had all left the hotel quite two hours before!

As soon as I was dressed I hurried to my mother and related the whole adventure. She was much excited, and proposed going at once to the British Embassy (to relate the story), which we did, and were admitted directly into Lord Queensland's presence. I was terribly disappointed when the great man assured us nothing whatever had been heard of the fugitives, and equally indignant when I discovered that both he and his *attaché* discredited my story! The ambassador was barely civil, and "thought" I had been "hoaxed," that my "imagination" had "exaggerated the facts," &c. He asked whether any person beside myself had witnessed "the alleged flight," and I fancied he seemed relieved when I replied in the negative; and my suspicions of his sincerity were still more aroused, by his evident anxiety that we should keep the story to ourselves, impressing upon my mother (who turned very pale) that we had better do so "for her pretty young daughter's sake." Being young and inexperienced, I missed the *innuendo*, but as the minister had early let out that he was "personally acquainted" with the Princess Lipetska, that she was "nearly related to the Imperial Family," and that such an "unlikely story" as mine might give great offence, I shrewdly suspected his anxiety for secrecy arose from some secret motive.

In a few minutes Lord Queensland rose, thus as he thought, ending the discussion; but feeling my veracity was unfairly impugned, I was not to be so summarily dismissed; besides the ambassador's parting words did not tend to soothe my irritation. "I advise you, madam," he said to my mother, "not to allow pretty Lady Muriel to sleep alone in a hotel again. Keep her to her dolls, dear lady; there are really no children nowadays."

This was unbearable, so losing all self-control, I said angrily, "It is a pity, my lord, that some old men should be chosen to fill high positions who are little better than 'dolls' themselves, especially when called upon to act in an emergency! And oh!" I cried, bursting into childish tears, "they are not so nice as dolls, for although their heads may be equally empty, *dolls have hair*, whereas, *old men very often—have not!*" Need I say Lord Queensland was bald?

My mother was horrified at my words, but the ambassador seemed tickled, and patting me on the shoulder, called me "a gold-headed little spitfire." I was not, however, to be mollified, and as I marched from the room, I said maliciously, "If you, my lord, will not take the story up, I shall spread it abroad, as an instance of the incompetency of our officials to defend the friendless!" To my surprise, I perceived that my words "at random sent, had found a mark they never meant;" for Lord Queensland, motioning to his *attaché* to close the door, said to my mother:

“ May I ask you a favour ? I frankly (!) confess I know something of the story, and I wished, for certain reasons, to keep it quiet. So will you—will your daughter—for the young prince’s sake—keep the secret until you hear from me ? ” My mother was so shocked at the ambassador’s want of candour, and so alarmed at the superabundance of that quality in me, that she would have promised anything to get away ; but I said coldly, “ It is a pity you should not have placed confidence in us from the first, instead of doing so only as a *pis-aller* ; but if (with great dignity, I said it) you can assure me, on the honour of an Englishman, (not of a diplomat,” I said cuttingly) “ that silence will serve the poor boy, I am ready to pass my word also.”

“ Any other course of action will injure him, Lady Muriel. ”

“ So be it,” I said loftily, delighted to feel that a *signorina* had proved herself no nonentity after all !

We took leave of the minister and his scared *attaché* and returned to the hotel, and it is needless to say we never heard again from His Excellency ; but in ten days’ time the papers informed us that his lordship had quitted Florence for some months.

The whole story seemed to have passed away like an uneasy dream. The Russians had vanished, and their rooms were now occupied by a common-place, middle-class English family, who I heard conversing about the “ Pitty Pally ” (meaning, I presumed, the Pitti Palais), and the *padrone* and his wife avoided mentioning the princess or any of her suite ; indeed the subject seemed so distasteful to them that we forbore alluding to it, and after a short unventful period had elapsed, we directed our footsteps homewards to London.

One morning my mother put the *Morning Post* into my hands, eagerly desiring me to read a paragraph aloud. It was a quotation from a St. Petersburg journal, and it ran thus : “ Great excitement has been caused lately in St. Petersburg, in consequence of a mysterious event, which has taken place in the family of the Prince Lipetska. His highness lost his first wife sixteen years ago, at the birth of the Prince Michael, who, although a delicate child, survived his mother, and was the object of his father’s tenderest affections. Four years ago the Prince Lipetska married again, choosing the Princess Myrza de Zeschaw, a lady of great beauty, and for whom, it was well known, a certain Exalted Personage avowed a distinctly paternal interest. The Princess Myrza bore two sons, and was a devoted mother, not only to her own offspring, but also to her step-son, who was much attached to her, and whose recent uncertain health seemed the only cloud in the princely pair’s domestic horizon.

“ A few months ago the young prince became so seriously ill that the best medical advice was sought, when change of air and a warm climate were suggested. The Prince Lipetska being unable just then to lay aside his court duties (he was one of the Czar’s highest functionaries), the princess offered to leave her own young

family, and proceed with her step-son to Italy, purposing (at the prince's wish) to visit a famous but very old doctor resident at Pisa, who had known the young Michael from his birth.

"Accordingly the princess started, accompanied by a priest, a *dame de compagnie* and a large suite; and they had not been long absent before it was remarked that the Prince Lipetska became greatly depressed, and that he was constantly closeted with a certain Doctor d'Obreskoff, who had attended the family for years, but who, in consequence of increasing age, and a strong dislike conceived against him by the princess, had given up his position as family physician. The accounts from Italy getting worse, the anxious father would have started at once to join his son, but (to the surprise of all parties) he yielded to Doctor d'Obreskoff's entreaties, and instead of going himself, dispatched a young English doctor, who received instructions to travel with the utmost speed.

"Dr. Granville's arrival at Pisa (bringing his credentials from the prince) took the princess entirely by surprise, and he installed himself without delay as medical companion to the sick boy, who took to him with a complete infatuation, refusing to eat, drink, or sleep save in his presence. One day, to the amazement of the St. Petersburg world, the young Michael arrived at his father's house, restored to health, and accompanied by a single servant! His father received him tearfully, but without surprise, and a few days later the whole family left St. Petersburg for an indefinite period. Nothing has been heard of the princess, and mystery shrouds the whole affair."

"There, mamma," I said, "you see I could tell them more than they know."

"What an awful thing," said my mother gravely. "I wonder what has become of that wretched woman, and whether we shall hear any more about it."

This question was answered a short time afterwards; for on the anniversary of the memorable night of the 17th September, I was sitting at my window, thinking over it all, when my mother called me, and to my surprise I discovered a travel-stained stranger in the room with her, and upon his turning towards me I exclaimed, "The young prince's English doctor!" He carried a parcel, and seemed overjoyed at seeing me, grasped my hand, calling me the *angiol protettore* and a host of pretty things, and when I had mastered my surprise I exclaimed, "How is the poor boy? Do—do tell me everything from the very beginning."

The young man smiled and said, "I have little to tell, or rather little that I may tell; and ere I begin may I beg of you both to keep all you know sacred? For although to some degree the story has become public, the whole truth is not known, and for the prince's sake I beg this favour of you."

We, of course, gave the required promise, and Dr. Granville proceeded with much feeling to tell us everything.

“The poor boy,” he said, “nearly fell a victim to the jealousy of the princess for her own children. She was administering small doses of poison to him, which were slowly but surely taking effect. I arrived just in time to save his life. The old Dr. d’Obreskoff had been haunted for some time by a horrid suspicion of foul play, and after the princess’s hurried departure to Italy, he determined to search her apartments privately, and he discovered such tangible proofs of her guilt—proofs, however, which a knowledge of medicine alone could recognize,—that he broke the awful truth to the prince, who could scarcely be restrained from starting at once to Italy to save his son. The doctor, however, advised differently, for his medical mind gathered from the most recent accounts, that nothing imminent was to be feared, and he knew that unless everything was arranged most diplomatically, the prince would have to contend against troubles and even dangers at court, in consequence of the princess’s high relationships. Luckily I was paying a visit at St. Petersburg at the time, and the old doctor knew all about me; how I had been brought up in the medical profession, but that developing a strong taste for adventure, I had been engaged in detective cases, and that thus I claimed an intimate personal acquaintance with the two most active agents in this case—medicine and murder. The prince sent me to Italy with full powers, only impressing upon me the absolute necessity of saving the princess’s reputation; and directly I arrived I warned Prince Michael of his own danger, of his father’s commands concerning the princess, that he was to eat, drink and sleep in my presence only, and to leave the rest to me. He was very ill when I arrived, but I soon inspired him with confidence, and during that dreadful journey to Florence I taught him to feign death. We had a rehearsal before arriving, and I found that like most Russians, his powers of acting were “first class.” I knew if I could only reach Florence I should be safe, as I was acquainted with Lord Queensland and had warned him of my coming; but the journey was perilous as I could not tell whether the princess had discovered who and what I was; besides, I feared the priest, and how much he guessed of the truth. However, thank God, all went well. All would have been easy could I have taken the *padrone* into my confidence, but the prince had solemnly bound me to trust no one—no servants, except Ivan, and I kept my word. In England every one would have helped me, but with Russians and Italians there are wheels within wheels. One of my greatest difficulties was to keep the princess and the priest out of the ‘death chamber,’ for I feared the prince betraying himself. So I burnt a concoction, ostensibly for sanitary purposes, which had the effect of causing those unused to it to feel faint, (as you did, Lady Muriel, and as he did, poor boy, at times, but we had to risk that.”)

“But,” interrupted I, “after he and Ivan had escaped where

did they go? He told me they should go to the English Embassy, but they did not do so."

"Forgive me, but they did, and were in the house when your mother and you called. Lord Queensland knew they were coming, and an hour had not elapsed after their flight, before a man came and whistled 'God Save the Queen' beneath the balcony (a pre-concerted sign), whereby I knew the fugitives were safe under the British flag. The ambassador, knowing about the princess's birth, acted with great caution."

"Eminently so," I said drily, "and how about the princess?"

"Ah, there I am tongue-tied. Suffice it to say that after the prince's disappearance, *my* personal dangers began, for I never lost sight of her, poor soul, till—— Ah, well, Russian laws and English laws are different, and grateful I am to have returned safe from so ugly a business."

Dr. Granville now rose to depart, and turning kindly to me he said, "Lady Muried, I parted from Prince Michael not many hours ago, and he said I was not to rest till I had seen you, till I had reminded you that this is the anniversary of his flight, and that all through life the 18th September will be a night sacred to the thought of you."

As the doctor said these words a curious sort of feeling came over me. His voice sounded strange, far off, and I seemed to see the gloomy bed-chamber, the moon-lit window, the boy in agonized supplication at my feet—the——

The doctor went on: "He sends an offering of humble gratitude; his words were, 'Put it into her own dear hands, but tell her to open it alone, tell her as she opens it, my voice will greet her, and tell her, oh tell her, we must meet again.'"

Without a word I took the parcel. I knew the doctor raised my hand and kissed it, and that, bowing to my mother, he left the room. I went slowly, dreamily upstairs, hearing as I did so the front door open and shut and the prince's messenger pass out and away! Sitting by my bed I passively recalled the words, "We must meet again," and eagerly tearing off the paper covering of the parcel I discovered a velvet casket, upon which "Muriella" was stamped in letters of gold. I took the pretty gold key and opened the casket, and I beheld a necklace of eighteen pearls (a pearl, I understood, for each day), and attached to it was a heart, pierced through by a diamond arrow. At the back of the arrow these words were engraved:

"Firenze,
Il 18 Settembre, 184—,
Gratitudine, Fede, Amore."

The heart opened, and within it I found—a shred of twisted rope—and a few withered forget-me-nots. I shed a few tears, I knew not why, and ran down and showed it to my mother.

“AS NIGHT FOLLOWS DAY.”

A STORY IN TWO PARTS,

By HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH,

AUTHOR OF “KILCORRAN,” “ROBIN ADAIR,” “DREAM FACES,” ETC.

“To thine own self be true,
And it shall follow, as the night the day,
Thou can’st not then be false to any man.”
Hamlet.

PART I.

“WELL, it’s my last chance of pulling through, mother, so there’s no use hesitating about it; all your life you have been urging me to marry an heiress, and now that I want to do so, you make moan over it as if I were bringing utter disgrace on the whole family!”

And Lord Francis Erldon, the impecunious younger son of a defunct Scotch peer, threw the morning paper down on the breakfast-table with most unnecessary violence, as he rose from his chair and took up a commanding position on the hearthrug, the better to face his lady-mother and all her expected remonstrances.

The Dowager Countess of Knottinghame was *très-grande dame*, that all the world realized, for was she not born a Pendragon of Tintagel, a family which claimed to have lived for many generations before ever the Norman laid the Saxon low? And as if it were not hard enough to know that her eldest son was a confirmed old bachelor, with a mania for moths, here was her favourite child, her Benjamin, threatening to sully the family escutcheon by a contemplated matrimonial alliance with a simple manufacturer’s daughter, to whose children the time-honoured title of Knottinghame must in all probability descend.

The great cheerful breakfast-room at Erldon House was a perfect blaze of warmth and sunshine on this bright September morning, but the faces of both mother and son were clouded and dark, and the barometer stood obviously at “stormy.”

“If her father had only been in some decent trade, I should not have minded half so much,” observed the irate Dowager,

after a melancholy pause. “But I must say, my dear Francis, I *do* draw the line at *buttons* !”

“Well, mother, it’s not to be denied that the great firm of Harding, Metal and Company certainly did make their money by the manufacture of those useful little articles, but I don’t see what that matters? A button ‘rampant’ will make a nice change in the family arms, with their endless dragons and wyvernes !” And a smile of lazy amusement crossed Lord Francis’ well-bred face as he glanced mischievously at his agitated parent.

“Now look here, my dear mother,” he continued with sudden gravity, “let us face the whole position quietly, and then I think you will very likely come round to my opinion without another word. It’s no novelty to you to hear that I am hard up, for I never was anything else so long as I can remember, but as yet my impecuniosity has been merely steady and chronic. Now, however, a crisis has arrived, and it simply comes to this—I *can’t* go on any longer ! I know that Knottinghame can’t afford to do more for me than he has done, and I won’t take another penny of yours—I’ve robbed you both enough as it is. But money I *must* have, by hook or by crook, and all I ask you is : to help me procure it by what seems the most feasible way. This daughter of old Harding the millionaire is the daughter of one of your oldest school friends, no matter whether the latter married a button manufacturer or a king ; therefore it is easy enough for you to ask her to come and stay here for a bit, and as she has neither father nor mother to consult, and has seldom left her dreary home amongst the smoky factory chimneys of the Black Country, it’s easy also to predict that she will very gladly accept your invitation, *voilà tout*.

“No, it’s *not* all,” moaned the Dowager, refusing to be comforted. “Next week is just the very last in which I should like to ask any questionable persons to the house, when you know well how particular our Aunt Doldrum is with regard to whom she meets !”

A stern look passed over Lord Francis Erldon’s face, making him appear ten years older than had been the case five minutes before, as he said decisively :

“Mother, the woman I consider fit to be my wife is surely fit for even the Dowager Duchess of Doldrum’s society? If all reports concerning her grace in days gone by are true, the ‘unfitness’ lies more on my great-aunt’s side than on that of this young girl.”

Lady Knottinghame kept a severe silence. Perhaps there was more truth in her son’s words than it was well to own, for the high-born ladies of the House of Pendragon had been more remarkable in times past for beauty of person than rigidity of virtue.

“One more reason I wish to urge against asking Miss Harding

here next week is, that Laura Fairfax will be with us then," and a tinge of aristocratic spite was apparent in her Ladyship's tones as she spoke.

Lord Francis' brows contracted with a look of deep vexation, but he looked his mother straight in the face with his keen dark eyes before which her own sank, as he said:

"All the more reason *for* her to come then, mother, I should say. It's as well to make sure that one really has lived down the follies of one's youth before asking some one else to share the wisdom of one's middle age," and Lord Francis' careless laugh told how easily his thirty-five years sat on him, in spite of debts, duns and difficulties.

"Well, my dear, if it must be, it must." Lady Knottinghame was never very long in coming round to any ideas entertained by this son of her heart. "I'll write to Miss Harding at once, if you wish it; and, oh! my dear boy, how I trust and pray she may prove even in the remotest degree worthy of you!"

"Worthy of me!" re-echoed Francis Erldon in bitter sarcasm "You had better pray that she may never discover how unworthy I am of *her*, mother."

"You underrate yourself, my son."

"Do I? Is it a thing to be proud of, to sell oneself for an heiress's money bags? to wish to rob a girl who at least has never done one any harm, of every chance in life of being married for sake of what she is, not for sake of what she has got? No, it will be a very one-sided bargain, mother; so keep all your pity for her, poor girl, if ever she marries *me*!"

And Lord Francis walked abruptly across the room and out at the door, with an irritable bang of the latter, which caused the Dowager Countess of Knottinghame to jump in her chair in a manner the reverse of dignified.

"Certainly, his affairs must have taken a most vexatious turn, poor boy," she murmured quite meekly. "And so I'll e'en do my best to secure this girl's money for him, but oh! if only it had not been *buttons*!"

* * * * *

A week later, and the hour 8 p.m., saw what the local county paper called "a large and aristocratic company" assembled before dinner in the long tapestry-hung drawing-room of Erldon House.

Lady Knottinghame was moving amongst her guests with urbane and stately dignity, trying hard to conceal by the warmth of her own manner the bored coldness of her eldest son's, the actual lord of the domain. After submitting with ill grace to one or two necessary introductions to people who were there as his own guests, Lord Knottinghame had subsided sulkily into a dark corner far away from every one, only wishing from the

bottom of his weak heart and mind that he had the nerve to get up and run away, turning his back on them all *sans cérémonie*.

Lord Francis Erldon, as he stood beside his hated great-aunt of Doldrum's chair, and soothed that worthy old fidget's dread of draughts, and fears for the consequences of uncovering her old shoulders so recklessly at her time of life, formed a striking contrast to his scowling and *farouche* elder brother. His handsome thorough-bred face wore the kindly smile which he always seemed to have for high or low, and the true courtesy of his bright winning manner invariably gained for him much flattering favour from both women and men, for Francis Erldon was one of those many in this world who are “nobody's enemy but their own.”

And yet an old friend of his was sitting even now amongst that assembled throng, who was rapidly changing into a calmly vindictive enemy; such an enemy as only a woman can become who sees her power over a man dying out, when her love for that same man has been merely a passing caprice, born of vanity,—not the leal and loyal faith which forgives all, and with lips trembling with pain can still lovingly say: “The King can do no wrong!”

When Francis Erldon was but a lad of twenty, fresh from college, Laura Gray had given him his first lesson in woman's perfidy—had engaged herself to him for the space of one week, during which she had coquetted with and fooled him to the top of the bent, and when the “black Monday” came, she had quietly intimated that he was no longer wanted, and must give place to a better, *i.e.*, a richer man, whose unexpected offer of marriage lay carefully ensconced in her pocket at that very moment.

The boy was too young and too honest to conceal his dire pain, and when they met again ten years later, after Laura had become both wife and widow in the interim, the eagerness with which her whilom victim accepted the very first overtures which the fascinating Mrs. Fairfax tendered to him, caused that astute lady to smile inwardly with a dulcet murmur: “*What fools men are!*”

And so the old game was played out in the old fashion—the man honestly and nobly in earnest, longing for the day when he should take this woman to be his wife until death should them part; the woman retaining his allegiance as a sop to her own vanity, but never for one instant losing either her heart or her head in a transaction which in her private estimation was always bound to be regarded from a prosaic and business-like point of view;—and to give up her rich jointure (as she was bound to do if she married again) for sake of a younger son encumbered with debt, seemed to her philosophical soul nothing short of perfect lunacy.

So for a year or two things drifted on, and the fair widow still

pleaded for "time;" but one fine day Francis Erldon lost all patience and forced the plain truth from her at last, that if she ever did consent to forfeit her rich inheritance, it would be for sake of an elder son and not a younger. He wasted no words on such a woman as Laura Fairfax, but turned on his heel and left her then and there—and never again did her beautiful face and caressing tones regain their hold on him.

But because he still treated her with polite courtesy whenever they met, her inordinate vanity prompted the invariable thought so soothing to itself, "poor fellow, he has not got over it." And the blow to that same vanity had been severe when Lady Knottinghame, with scarcely veiled spite, told her of the expected arrival of the great heiress that very night, and all the hopes and fears which she entertained with regard to the success that she prayed might be the portion of her most dearly beloved younger son, in securing unto himself the richly-endowed hand of the millionaire's daughter.

Seated rather near the entrance door to the drawing-room, with a background of palms and ferns setting off her pale rose-pink dress to great advantage, pretty Mrs. Fairfax was actively engaged in discussing the projected matrimonial alliance in the plainest and most uncomplimentary terms, with a confidential friend on whose sympathy she could rely.

"So vulgar as she must be, too!" sighed the fair widow with ostentatious sorrow for her quondam lover. "Think how it must gall the pride of a man like Francis Erldon to be reduced to selling himself for gold to the button-maker's daughter!"

"Insufferable! And after the experience which has been his of what a sweet woman *can* be!" and Cassandra Toady turned one eye towards her companion to see how this bare-faced flattery went down, and the other up to the heavens to denote her indignation at man's fatuity.

"Take care, my dear Cassandra, your emotion is mastering your eyesight," observed Mrs. Fairfax spitefully. "I couldn't tell for an instant whether you were admiring the chandelier or myself! But I wonder whether this heiress will appear covered with diamonds presently—she's sure to do something outrageous."

"And they say she possesses the finest diamonds in the world!" murmured the Toady enthusiastically. She had not yet forgiven the last snub.

"Paste, I daresay, all the same. Let us hope that at least her *gold* is not glitter only, else Lord Francis Erldon will have made a sorry bargain after all when he marries old Harding's daughter to save himself from bankruptcy."

The clear, metallic tones of Mrs. Fairfax struck distinctly on the ear of one who at that moment entered the door which was close behind the former lady's seat, and who for one single in-

stant paused and stood still, as if listening for more. Then a quiet smile of contempt crossed the stranger's face, and Janet Harding walked directly across the circle of assembled guests to greet her hostess, with the most admirable composure and self-possession.

A tall, slender girl, dressed very simply in white, and with no single stone of all her vaunted diamonds on either arms or neck, the millionaire's daughter had still a distinct personality of her own which made her stand out clearly from the crowd of fashionable women surrounding her. Unlike these latter, her hair was put back from her forehead quite simply, and twisted into a mass of reddish-brown plaits at the back of a very neat head; and though she could never by any chance lay claim to the coveted title of a beauty, there was that in Janet Harding's face which made whomsoever looked at it once, look at it again and again.

Its most striking characteristic was a resoluteness almost strange in the face of so young a girl, and her grey eyes had the same deep resolute look which matched so well with it, and which seemed to speak of great decision of character. But the bright honest smile which flashed all over her face as she spoke in answer to Lady Knottinghame's somewhat ostentatious greeting, seemed to lessen her age by years, and render her at once into a shy child, rather than a great heiress who had already attained to the dignity of twenty-one years.

"My youngest son must be presented to you, Miss Harding, in place of his elder brother, who is deep in an entomological discussion at the far end of the room," said Lady Knottinghame apologetically. "Lord Francis Erldon—Miss Harding."

The frank grey eyes that met his own with a quick, penetrating look had a discomposing effect on Lord Francis's equanimity, for they seemed to read his very soul. Moreover, he was unpleasantly conscious of Mrs. Fairfax's satirical smiles and audible whispers to her toady elect, so he cut the ceremony of this public introduction most distinctly short.

"Poor fellow, how he feels his unfortunate position!" murmured the fair Laura, fanning herself.

Could Miss Harding have overheard the words? For one instant, her small red-brown head turned itself in the direction of the speaker, and her clear, quiet eyes grasped every detail of the latter's identity, then she looked away again, and answered calmly the polite questions put to her by her hostess respecting her journey that day.

At dinner the heiress sat exactly opposite to Lord Francis Erldon, and without making his observation of her conspicuous, the latter lost no opportunity of carefully studying every word and look of his *vis-à-vis*, and more than once he found himself listening with real interest to her clear low voice, as she strove to make her somewhat quaint ideas on things in general intelligible to the

very ordinary stamp of gentlemanly young noodle who had been appointed by Lady Knottinghame to escort her into dinner.

"She's no fool," thought my Lord Francis to himself with great satisfaction. For he was quite old and experienced enough to know that "brains" will outlive "beauty" and must always conquer in the long run, and a good companion would be of more value in a man's life than faultless beauty if accompanied by lack of wisdom and common sense.

And during the long half-hour which in the course of the evening he devoted to the entertainment of the young stranger, his favourable opinion of her grew each moment stronger, for her manner was graceful and perfectly unaffected, and her bright ringing laugh fell merrily on the ear, whilst every word she spoke convinced him more and more that she was "worth talking to," an attribute which ladies who rely on their character for being "beauties" are apt only too often to underrate.

* * * * *

"Is that the only answer you will give me?" and Lord Francis Erldon's tone of wrathful bitterness is in no way "put on," as he stands confronting the millionaire's daughter on the wide green terrace which leads to the far-famed rose-garden at Erldon House.

"The only one, Lord Francis," answers Janet Harding steadily. Her hands are full of beautiful Gloire de Dijon roses that the hot September sun has brought out in all their glory once more, and she buries her face in their fragrant clusters as she speaks—possibly to hide lips which *will* tremble and eyes which *will* fill with tears, for all her pride.

"You might at least tell me why it is so absolutely impossible for you to entertain the idea of marrying me?" pursues Francis Erldon with gloomy sarcasm. The rejection of his suit is causing him far deeper pain than he cares to own, not on the score of vanity, for to do him justice he is quite above so petty a reason as that,—but he has learnt to like the girl honestly for herself alone, and of late her grey eyes have had a far greater fascination for him than her golden wealth. Also the blow is an utterly unexpected one, for without being a vain man, he cannot fail to know that he is not unpopular with women in general, and moreover that this woman in particular has always appeared to be peculiarly bright and happy whenever circumstances have thrown them together and left them to their own society. So he considers himself an exceedingly ill-used man on the whole, and digs his heel into the velvet sward with a vicious vindictiveness that causes ugly marks on its smooth green surface, and will bring grief to the heart of Lord Knottinghame's head gardener on the morrow.

"Miss Harding, can you not give me a more definite reason for

your refusal of me?" repeats Lord Francis angrily. "Say straight out that you hate me, and be honest."

"I *don't* hate you," and Janet's voice trembles slightly; then she looks him straight in the face with her clear true eyes and speaks out frankly: "But I must tell you that I know you would never have thought of marrying me if I had not been rich; and, Lord Francis, I am too proud to buy what should be given me as my woman's right!"

For a long moment dead silence reigns, and in that space of time Francis Erldon realizes two unalterable facts: that he loves and respects this girl who stands there before him as he never thought to love any woman on earth, and that for this very reason alone he can never again subject himself to the humiliation of hearing the scorn in her honest tones as she pronounces her decisive rejection of his suit.

"So be it, and I will never ask you again," he says quietly and resolutely.

Janet Harding glances earnestly at him, and continues to speak in a low, sorrowful tone:

"Perhaps you will think more kindly of me, Lord Francis, when I tell you frankly that were I poor instead of rich my answer would have been a very different one. But on the very first evening that I arrived at your brother's house, some words which I accidentally overheard made it plain to me, that the apparent warm-hearted kindness which your mother and yourself showed me had below the surface a mere interested design on my fortune, nothing more. And I liked you all so much, Lord Francis, that this fact struck bitterly home!"

Francis Erldon makes no answer. How can he deny the truth of her words? And yet the evening she speaks of seems to him merely a dream, so changed have all his feelings towards her become in this short time. But he sees that appearances are too surely against him, and, being a proud man, utters no word in his own defence.

"I can never tell you how great my pleasure was when first your mother's letter reached me," continues Janet sadly. "In my ignorance I fully believed that love for a dead-and-gone school friendship of long ago had been the sole motive which prompted her to write to me so kindly, offering me a welcome to her home for my *mother's* sake," adds the girl in sorrowful sarcasm.

Francis Erldon glances at her bravely and says:

"Don't blame my mother, Miss Harding; it was at *my* suggestion she wrote to you. From first to last I alone am to blame." And the dogged resolution with which he speaks vouches for the truth of his words.

"I am glad of that," replies Janet quietly, "and now we will drop this subject for ever, Lord Francis," and no tremor betrays the inward despair that is creeping over the girl's heart and soul.

To the last she had hoped against hope that her lover could have honestly denied the accusation of being a fortune-hunter, and only now realizes how truly she loves him, when pride and self-respect are forcing her to give him up.

Ah! how gladly would she lay all her wealth at his feet could it purchase him even one hour's happiness! With what joy would she give him everything she possessed in the world, and clear away all the debts and difficulties clouding his life—could he only have loved her as she loved him!

But Janet Harding's clear common sense stands her in good stead now, and though she longs from the bottom of her heart to say, “Take all, for without you nothing can be of value to me in this world!” she only holds out to him a firm little untrembling hand, with the kind honest words:

“I will not be your wife, Lord Francis, for your sake and my own. But if you will some day let me be your friend I shall like it better than anything else in the whole world!”

For one moment he hesitates. Would it be *utterly* impossible to right himself in her eyes? Would she never in this world know how truly he cared for her now, and how small a value her colossal fortune held in his heart compared to one glance from her sweet grey eyes? But pride conquers, and he speaks no word, so they clasp hands silently and each goes on their way in the world with sorrowful regret.

* * * * *

The idea of beautiful scenery is seldom associated with the manufacturing districts of our native land; and yet here and there, even where tall factory chimneys reign rampant o'er the landscape, and the very sheep are blackened by a perpetual atmosphere of soot and smoke, an occasional glimpse of better things is visible, as one is hurried along by an express train “going north.”

Large, comfortable-looking country houses, surrounded by trees, peep forth on every side; and clusters of solid, stone-built cottages rise up in numbers in this populous part of the country, cumbering the ground with an overwhelming population, that ebbs and flows like the tide of the sea. And in contrast to such spots as these, where half the world appears to be crowding out the other half, every now and then a bleak barren moor or endless stretch of lonely downs meets the eye, bidding a seeming defiance to the encroachments of “bricks and mortar,” or the levelling efforts of plough and spade.

Eight o'clock on “a wild March morning” saw Langwold Downs in all its wide loneliness, as Janet Harding rode slowly up the winding path which led from the more civilized regions below to the long stretch of sound turf that covered the highest parts of the downs, famous as the training-ground for more than one well-known racing stable in a certain northern county of England.

An early ride before breakfast was a favourite pastime of Janet's, and perhaps nothing had been of greater service in arousing her to activity of mind and body, during the keen suffering and alternate listless apathy of the last eight months of her life, than this daily gallop over the Langwold Downs in weather fair or foul. For Miss Harding was no "fair-weather lass," and many a wandering rustic was nearly startled out of the few wits with which Nature had endowed him, by the sudden apparition of a little grey mare and neat grey habit through a break in the mist, the sound of galloping hoofs disappearing into the far distance alone reassuring him that the vision was of the earth, earthy, and no supernatural phenomenon such as his "grannie" had loved to tell of.

Of late, too, a fresh element of interest had been added to these early morning rides, for amongst the several strings of race-horses which did their allotted work at this hour on the downs every day, was one belonging to the astute old trainer who in past years had had charge of the late Mr. Harding's horses, that worthy manufacturer never having outlived his true Yorkshire love of a good horse, even amidst all the trouble and turmoil of money-making.

So old Barnes' bluff honest face beams with welcome whenever his late master's daughter rides up and joins him on the downs of a morning; and many a stirring gallop is criticized by the clear grey eyes of "Miss Janet," unknown to the world at large.

The thick wreaths of mist were hurled on one side by the sharp north-easter which was blowing on this self-same wild March morning with considerable force across the high ridge of ground, and Miss Harding quickly discerned the burly form of Mr. Barnes on his stout bay cob, anxiously directing the work of a string of horses in clothing, which were walking leisurely up and down in his vicinity.

"I'm pleased you've come this morning, Miss Janet," he observed smilingly, as Miss Harding's grey hack ranged up alongside of the sober cob, and that young lady bid him a bright good morrow. "I've something to show you that'll please you, I think," and the worthy man's face grew even redder than before with secret elation as he pointed with his whip towards the line of horses walking to and fro near them.

Janet's quick eyes travelled scrutinizingly over the group, and then she exclaimed: "I see! That bay horse walking behind old Dancing Master is a new arrival. What horse is it, Barnes?"

"It's the first favourite for the 'Two Thousand,' Miss Janet, *that's* what it is!" said the old man proudly, in a tone which suggested "beat that if you can."

Janet Harding coloured rosy-red, and eagerly exclaimed: "Do you really mean it is Culloden, Lord Francis Erldon's horse?"

"I do," said Mr. Barnes sententiously.

"But I don't understand! *You* are not his trainer, Barnes?" inquired Miss Harding with a puzzled air.

"Not before this week, Miss Janet. But, you see, his Lordship had a bit of a tiff with his own trainer, somehow, though I can't tell you the rights of it all, because I don't know them myself, exactly; but the long and short of it is, that his Lordship wrote me a letter, and an uncommon flattering letter too, Miss Janet, asking me to take charge of his colt and train him for his engagement in the 'Two Thousand,' and though five weeks is little enough time to have given me for to wind him up as I would like, I'll do my living best by the colt, and that's all I can say. Aye, but he's a clever-shaped one, Miss Janet! Though his temper's not to my liking, perhaps. But you shall see him gallop."

The unconquerable stab of pain which any thought connected with Francis Erldon so invariably brought to Janet's heart, died away in the breathless interest with which she watched the horse on which rumour said Francis Erldon's last hope depended—and for once rumour did not err.

When Lord Francis had parted from Janet Harding on the terrace at Erldon that bright autumn day, now six months ago, he had gone out into the world a well-nigh ruined man, wrecked by every sort of rock a man's life may split on. Harassing debts and difficulties surrounded him on all sides, and how to extricate himself he knew not. More than one complaisant heiress threw herself at his head, less noble-minded than Janet Harding, but far more willing to buy his title and his handsome face at any price, but he would none of them. Strange to say, the thought that once had seemed so easy a solvance of all his troubles, *i.e.*, "to marry an heiress," now appeared positively loathsome to him; and since the day on which he had clasped Janet's hand in farewell, no other woman in the world could boast of having won even an admiring look from him, or a single word of aught save the merest courtesy.

But a chance of rescue came from an unexpected quarter. A cousin of his had died suddenly, one who had been his "chum" at school, his companion in many a racing venture later on, and who, having nothing else to leave as a legacy behind him, bequeathed the best of a bad lot of two-year-olds to his well-beloved friend and cousin, Lord Francis Erldon. This colt had only just succeeded in getting a "place" in the Champagne Stakes at Doncaster, but improved rapidly, winning the Middle Park Plate with such consummate ease from a field of good horses in the month following, that he settled down firmly as first favourite for the "Two Thousand" throughout the long dead season of the year.

ON THE WING.

By W. W. FENN,

AUTHOR OF "BLIND MAN'S HOLIDAY," ETC.

"IN the life of the present age there is no more striking feature than an impatience of space. We are striving hard in every possible way to annihilate it, and in some have succeeded tolerably well. Space is now no barrier to the interchange of thought. A man able to pay the cost can at any moment talk with the antipodes. Before the 'vinegar' of science and engineering skill mountain ranges melt, and with shovel and dynamite we dig and blast a water road through isthmuses which have parted oceans since the beginning of the world. We burrow a dry path under rivers and estuaries, and seriously contemplate preparing a course for iron steeds beneath narrow seas. Everything that sunders man and man goes down before his impatience, and so the whole earth is gradually being bound together by links of mutual knowledge and all-embracing interests. This good work must go on."

Assuredly it must and assuredly it will, and whilst fully endorsing the views of the writer of the above, it may be fairly prophesied that a more thorough annihilation of space than any yet existing will sooner or later come to pass, and by a means more comprehensive and far-reaching than any of those catalogued in the foregoing sentences. The memory of man travels not back to the time when he did not long to fly. Holy Writ records the aspirations of David in this direction, and we may assume indeed that ever since the hour when human beings began to comprehend the advantages of passing with the swiftness of a bird from place to place in defiance of all geographical obstacles, they have pined and striven to do the like. The instinct now is as keen as ever, nay, as we see, keener. Magical as are the results of steam, electricity, telephony, and the whole variety of means which the ingenuity of man has devised for bringing the ends of the earth together, they all sink into insignificance by the side of the bare idea of what would be effected in his life by the gift of wings. If it were possible for him to don a thoroughly efficient pair as readily as he can mount a bicycle, or if he could as readily jump into a flying machine as he can now into a Hansom cab, there is no conceiving what would come about

in the world both material and mental. Until, however, we are a little nearer the consummation of such a stupendous end, we can only speculate about it; but to do this is interesting. The overwhelming revolution which it would cause in every condition of daily life, not only to the individual, but to whole nationalities, is, however, almost beyond the grasp of our imagination. Although inventors of every degree, engineers and scientists of highest renown are confident that some day it will be possible for men to traverse the air at least as perfectly and securely as they do now the seas, to the multitude that day appears as far off as ever.

Meanwhile, therefore, as we are still fettered to the earth, held close down to it by that mysterious law called gravitation, we must do the best we can here. Such imperfect means of aerostation as have as yet been placed at our disposal have only served to give us the faintest inkling of the advantages that might ensue, and of the sensations which would be called up if we held the air even as much under subjugation as we do the waters. Hitherto ballooning has been of so little practical use as to be scarce worth counting. For the nonce, therefore, it is only in imagination that we can soar to the empyrean and defy our earthly bonds. We must rely on fancy for the feelings and emotions which we should experience if we were actually fitted with an equivalent for the wings of the dove. Many of us truly, it is to be feared, would in that case only use them to "fly away and be at rest," but it is, nevertheless, in that poetic sense perhaps that the possession of them wears the most alluring and fascinating aspect. The world is so full of sadness and heart-sickness, so full of jaded, toil-worn misery, that the ability to fly away from it all and find in some distant, undreamt-of sphere health-restoring repose would be hailed with avidity as a supreme blessing by only too many of us. If such were the case with the aged and the weary, happily it would not necessarily be so with youth and maturity. Their enterprise and energy would doubtless turn the mighty boon to good account for the benefit of the whole human race, so that we might hope to see an enormous reduction of pain, fatigue and down-trodden suffering. When a physical object in view could be reached with the directness and celerity of a bird's flight subjective purposes would be accomplished almost with equal rapidity. If we could go straight to a point "as the crow flies," how, for instance, the partings from beloved ones would be robbed of more than half their present sorrowful pangs! What endless solace and comfort would be brought to many a bed of sickness or death, brought almost with the wish! What gaps in family circles might be filled up by the now sorely missed beloved presence! What dear faces could be restored to our embrace, and the welcome hand-grip of old days almost instantly felt again!

"Oh! would I were a bird, that I might fly to thee," would no longer be but the empty refrain of a popular song—no longer a

vain aspiration of the lovers whom cruel space had severed,—but an unnecessary and gratuitous wish. “On the wings of love” would cease to be a metaphor merely—for on them fond hearts would positively fly to the rendezvous to taste the sweets of those precious moments of happiness only to be found in “love itself possessed.” The veritable bodily presence too would redeem mistakes, smooth away misunderstandings, and overcome the obstacles and difficulties which time and distance alone may have set up against the ultimately happy union. Romance and sentiment, as now understood, would undoubtedly suffer; but since these emotions are unluckily falling to a discount in these days, they might perchance be so rehabilitated and so transformed as to present themselves in a guise more consonant with present thought and feeling. Advanced science declares that as it advances still farther, it will gradually crush out poetry and those mythical imaginings which, so far as human record goes, have ever held a prominent place amidst the multitude of undefinable sensations in man; or that at the best it must so transmogrify the form with which the poet now invests them, as to be unrecognizable for the result of the same instinct.

It is fortunate for science that it affords this alternative, for so surely as man continues to exist, so surely will imagination and poetry exist as attributes of his higher intelligence. We may venture to predict that no earthly power will ever stamp them out or eliminate them from the intellectual brain. Imagination will continue to “body forth the form of things unknown,” and the “poet’s pen” continue to turn them to shape, “and give to airy nothings a local habitation and a name.” The shape may be different, the “local habitation” may be changed, the name may be altered, but the “airy nothings” will remain. Thus we need not fear that any material injury to true sentiment would be inflicted by man’s acquisition of an equivalent for the pinions of an eagle, with the consequent control over the air which they would give him. Indeed they would unquestionably open up a vast and hitherto unknown field for the exercise of his loftiest faculties. The new and very startling facts which they would reveal would form a basis for a thousand thoughts and fancies at present undreamt of. Even his very nature might be modified, gradually changed perhaps. Although good and evil would continue their contest as they have ever done, and in all probability their mystery would remain unsolved, their consequences might assume more manageable proportions, or they might not. Who knows? Who can say? The bird of prey would swoop down upon his quarry according to his nature, but his quarry would be enabled to evade attack or escape by the equal swiftness of his motive power. Wars, for instance, might not cease from off the land, or if they did, would merely be removed to the skies, and one trembles to contemplate what effect armed hosts invading

the air would have upon the system and strategy, the weapons and the shields, of the opposing forces. Every condition, every detail of battle would be altered—so much so it might be hoped that the final outcome would be a general agreement on the part of mankind to give over the terrible game once and for ever.

Such speculations, however, inevitably and literally plunge us more and more into the clouds, landing us no one can say where. Whether we look at small matters or large, private or public, it signifies little. The consequences of the great revolution are so interminable that the more we think about them, the more puzzling to the imagination they grow. There is nevertheless a fascination, it seems to us, in the subject which carries the mind forward into the possibilities in spite of itself. The fact that their name is legion gives us little check, and therefore for the moment we will pursue our meditations a stage further. Certain it is that like a bird or a bee we should each in our degree, in private life at least, follow out our business and our desires, "for every man" would continue to have "business and desire such as it is"—of that we may be well assured. Hence, therefore, it can be assumed that he would travel direct to them—go straight to his purpose by a "bee line." This would become the railway patronized by all.

Then, as a small item in the marvellous revolution, think of the wonderful effect on the ear which this means of locomotion would produce. What a flapping, buzzing, humming, singing, whistling, would fill the air! The rumbling of wheels, the clatter of horses' hoofs, or the jarring, creaking, scrooping and puffing of the locomotive, would be exchanged for something akin to the music of flying insects. The world might then, perhaps, be likened to what Tennyson calls the lime trees, "the summer home of murmurous wings." Or the surface of the globe might be regarded as a field of grass, whereon, wafted at the sweet will of every passing breath of wind, the prosperous and well-to-do might disport themselves after the manner of "the scarlet-spotted fly," in one of poor Richard Jefferies' charming pastoral papers, who "whirls his wings about and splashes himself with sunlight, like the children on the sands. He thinks not of the grass and sun; he does not heed them at all—and that is why he is so happy—any more than the barefoot children ask why the sea is there, or why it does not quite dry up when it ebbs. He is unconscious; he lives without thinking about living, and if the sunshine were a hundred hours long, still it would not be long enough. No, never enough of sun and sliding shadows that come like a hand over the table to lovingly reach our shoulder, never enough of the grass that smells sweet as a flower, not if we could live years and years equal in number to the tides that have ebbed and flowed, counting backwards four years to every day and night, backward still till we found out which came first, the night or the day." If

we could not hope to attain through the agency of wings, to such a blissful condition of moral content as the writer attributes to this gorgeously caparisoned insect, if we could not all expect to be endowed with that light-hearted unconsciousness which Mr. Jefferies attributes to his "scarlet-spotted fly," it would be no small gain to be able suddenly to decamp from London, for instance, or any other murky, grimy region, when the dense fogs of winter settle upon it, and by a hey! presto! sort of process, spread our wings, and in a few moments find ourselves basking or bathing in the sunshine at Brighton, or in any other salubrious and cheerful atmosphere. The feats of travel which we should be enabled to perform would put us on a footing, if the expression may be permitted, with the swiftest of any of Shakespeare's tricky sprites. We should think nothing of putting a girdle round the earth in less than forty minutes, and Puck or Ariel would no longer be regarded as prodigies of speed. Like rumour we could make the wind our post horse, and spread our good news or bad, our scandals and false reports, with the quickness of lightning. "On a bat's wing do I fly," we should all hold as a scarcely metaphorical burden for our night journeys, and the mail bags with the subsequent delivery of their contents would be carried from place to place in a manner calculated to arouse with joy from their graves the spirits of Sir Rowland Hill and Anthony Trollope, or everybody might become his own carrier-pigeon.

The power to soar aloft, whether by day or night, besides the good and useful account to which it might be put, offers, too, an idea of personal and even sensuous enjoyment, very stimulating and new. To hover, to float in mid-air like lark or hawk, and thence at an untold height to gather in the prospect of the earth, spread in its vastness like a variegated carpet beneath, to drift gently before the soft winds of the quiet summer time, like a swimmer on the bosom of a tranquil flowing tide, or to descend and skim the ground, darting and whisking in and out, up and down, amongst all objects natural or artificial, with the ceaseless, noiseless motion and celerity of the swallow; to do all this might yield sensations quite beyond anything yet understood by man. The better and higher side of his nature could only be perfected and strengthened by the revelations gained by his wondrous flights, rising as he would by day into the sun-lit fields of space, and by night into closer contact with the mysterious depths of the starry heavens. It might add not a little to that impulse deep-seated in every breast, which lifts the soul at times into the regions of the blessed. The appearance of the material world from a vast altitude would inspire us with so infinite a feeling of awe, and so impress us with our own insignificance, that it is not too much to expect as a result the awakening of a deeper spiritual existence; and angels' wings would seem no longer a mere symbol for expressing the means for wafting our purified natures to the

realms above. We now living, however, can hardly expect to experience the benefits, or perchance the reverse, of the strange transformation in any of its manifold developments. The steps of science are slow, not always sure, and often necessary to be retraced ; but our faith is strong in the ultimate success of man's puny attempts to vie in some sort with the winged creatures of the air. Our children's children even may only see the beginning of the triumph, but when that triumph is complete, judging from the progress already made in contrivances for the annihilation of space with its corresponding advantages to the human race, we may prophesy that the outcome cannot be otherwise than for the general good.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SUNDAY CALL.

WHETHER a hapless young man be in love or not the world has to go on as usual. He must get up of a morning, eat, drink, and, to a great extent, pursue his usual avocations. The passion which consumes him is sedulously hidden from the vulgar eye, as something too sacred for it to gaze upon. His sufferings are borne heroically and in silence.

A promise made to a lady, even although that lady be not the object of your affections, is entitled to respect. An honourable gentleman feels himself bound to fulfil it, whether his inclinations do or do not approve. Having pledged his word, there is no going back.

This conviction was strong upon Bob's mind when Sunday afternoon arrived. Since meeting Lady De Fochsey in the train she had occupied but a comparatively small share of his thoughts. Nevertheless he remembered his appointment.

Consequently, he dressed himself with extra care, and, after eating a hearty lunch, set out on foot for her ladyship's house, whose locality he had previously ascertained. He had gone to church that morning in the hope of seeing Dot, but Dot for some reason or other was not present, and he felt the sacrifice had been vain, and wondered feverishly when and how he should see her again. If only he could catch a glimpse of the doctor then he might arrange a day for his daughter to go out hunting; but at present the future was shrouded in obscurity. He kept contriving all sorts of plans by which they might meet. Most successful projects in imagination, and yet ones that when he came to meditate seriously upon putting them into operation seemed to contain some element which might possibly displease Dot, and were therefore promptly discarded. Four whole days had passed since he had seen her. It appeared a miracle how

people could live so close to each other, and meet so seldom. And yet he had marched up and down the road in front of the doctor's house at least a dozen times. If this were to go on life would not be worth living.

Altogether, Bob felt thoroughly disheartened. Since his immersion in the brook he had not been well. He could not throw off the chill which he had then caught, and although he refused to take any care of himself, and pooh-poohed the idea of obtaining medical advice, a sense of physical discomfort added to the despondency of his mental condition.

But the walk did him good. His way led through pleasant country lanes, where the thorny bramble still retained a few red and yellow leaves, and where bright clusters of scarlet berries peeped out from the dark hedge-rows. A sharp frost had prevailed the night before. In the shade the grass was still covered by a silvery burden; but where the wintry sun rested upon it, there the rime had disappeared, leaving behind a faint trace of moisture, which lent freshness to the herbage and appetite to the browsing cattle. As a rule the Stiffshire roads are not celebrated for their cleanliness. The rain that descends lies about in miry puddles, and takes days to percolate through the heavy clay soil. But to-day there was no need to turn up even a trouser hem. They were bleached quite white and hard, except here and there where the sun had chanced to slant down upon them with peculiar force. The air was still and sharp; the sky faintly blue, fading away to a misty grey where it touched the horizon. Every now and again as he walked along, the deep lowing of cattle, or the crisp swish of grass torn violently from its roots, broke the silence. Otherwise, scarce a sound was to be heard.

Before long Bob arrived at his destination.

Lady De Fochsey's house was well situated on the summit of a gentle incline. Though by no means large—being, in fact, little more than a hunting box—it commanded a fine panorama. Grass, grass, grass. That was what could be seen from its bay windows, added to three or four dark patches on the sky-line, which represented well-known coverts, half a dozen church steeples, and as many villages; the whole intersected by rows upon rows of fences, some big, some little, but mostly the former, and all crossing and re-crossing each other at a variety of different angles. A great green chess-board, somewhat irregularly marked out, but whereon all the motley crowd of players enjoyed themselves to the full. A country on which the fox-hunter's eye rested with unqualified admiration and approval, but in which the uninitiated could descry nothing except a series of big, dreary fields, bleak and bare to a degree, and destitute of all beauty, save that of space.

Bob marched up a bijou drive, planted with trees that looked as if they ought to grow, but either couldn't or wouldn't, and rang the bell.

Upon the door being opened he inquired if her ladyship were at home.

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he was at once shown into a small but luxuriously-furnished drawing-room, literally crowded with feminine knick-knacks and conceits. Books, flowers, music, bulrushes, peacock feathers, Japanese fans, screens, ornamental photograph stands, china, grotesque monsters, &c., met the eye in every direction. Last, but not least, curled up on a white fur hearth-rug before the fire were two fat, wheezy pugs, with huge blue satin bows tied round their creasy necks, and, without compare, the grotesquest monsters of all.

Altogether, a room in which evidences of female folly and female refinement were curiously blended, producing a mixed impression on the acute observer.

For a few minutes Bob stood with his back to the hearth—the pugs occupied the central position, and he could only secure one corner—familiarizing himself with these various details, and trying to determine where the refinement ended and the folly began. But this was a point not easily arrived at, and requiring a much greater critic on art furniture.

In justice to his taste, he did not wholly approve of all he saw. He had a man's impatience of useless lap-dogs, and pugs in particular, especially be-ribboned pugs; also of flimsy antimacassars, gimcrack chairs, and little spindle-legged tables, that had the horrid knack of overturning on the slightest provocation. Good, solid, sensible furniture was what he liked; not all these three-cornered, new-fangled arrangements, which blocked up a room and made people afraid to move in it. These reflections passed through his mind as he stood awaiting her ladyship's arrival. She was a long time in coming; and, impelled by curiosity, he took to examining the various photographs so liberally dotted about.

They were nearly all portraits of gentlemen belonging to that class which Dot Lankester would probably have designated as "mashers." The same vacuous expression of self-content adorned the countenances of them all. Their hair was parted down the middle, and beautifully brushed; their coats were tightly buttoned over their manly chests; a pocket-handkerchief invariably protruded—presumably to let the public know that the owner possessed such an article—and in the matter of shirt-fronts, cuffs, studs, sleeve-links, watch-chains, charms, rings, gloves and button-holes, they were simply beyond reproach. As specimens of what careful and elaborate dressing can do, they were "Things of beauty, a joy for ever." Only not men. At least, so it seemed to Bob. There was an air of effeminacy about these mute reproductions of living objects which made him turn away from them in disgust. He felt an irresistible desire to divest the originals of some of their smoothness and gloss, and meet them in a fair stand-up fight.

Continuing his tour of examination, he came upon a photograph of Lady De Fochsey—the only female one in the room—which he remarked with some wonderment. She was depicted in full evening costume, extremely *décolletée*, standing beside a marble column, with both hands clasped tragically behind her head, thus boldly calling attention to the seductive curves of her graceful figure.

Bob looked long and critically at this masterpiece of the photographic art, coldly ascertaining the lady's good and bad points, and dissecting each feature with cynical composure. Lady De Fochsey's eyes were fine, her nose small and straight, her mouth passable, a trifle thin-lipped, but otherwise unobjectionable. No doubt, as the world goes, a very pretty woman; and yet although he admitted her beauty, it was a face that possessed no fascination for him. The expression spoilt it. It was artificial, unreal and insincere.

He had just arrived at this conclusion, when a rustling of skirts was heard outside in the passage. He glanced at the clock. She had kept him waiting exactly twenty minutes. Luckily, time was of no particular importance, else he might have felt more aggrieved than he did. The afternoon had to be whiled away somehow.

At the near approach of their mistress, the pugs began to display a slight animation outside their own immediate circle of interests, represented by the fire and the hearthrug. The youngest and slimmest half rose from her recumbent position; the eldest condescended to cease snoring, and gave vent to one or two short, snappy barks, that might mean satisfaction, but which certainly sounded more like irritation at the entry of a second intruder.

Lady De Fochsey appeared on the threshold, clad in an exquisite toilette of dark blue velvet, which set off her golden locks, azure eyes, and pink and white complexion to perfection. She had not lived twenty-eight, nearly twenty-nine, years in the world without learning the art of making the most of herself.

Bob had promised to come early, and he had been even better than his word; in consequence of which, her ladyship, instead of being already seated in state to receive her Sunday afternoon visitors, found herself compelled to struggle into the velvet gown in a desperate hurry and slur over those last delicate touches of rouge, which, when artistically applied, added so greatly to her appearance. Not that the rouge had been omitted, only her cheeks were rather more hectic than usual, and consequently required a subdued light.

But her drawing-room was so arranged that this could easily be obtained.

"A thousand pardons for keeping you waiting such an unconscionable time, Mr. Jarrett," she exclaimed effusively, holding out both her white bejewelled hands with a pretty foreign air of apology. "I was just finishing a letter to a soldier cousin of mine,

at the Cape, when you were announced, and thought you would be good enough to excuse me for a few minutes. These foreign letters are always rather an undertaking. One has to cram so much news into them, and has to rack one's brains to find the where-withal."

This letter to the soldier cousin was a most gratuitous invention on Lady De Fochsey's part, but it sounded better than telling the truth, which would have been——

"Ahem! Mr. Jarrett, I'm sorry to have kept you so long, but I had to go upstairs and dress, and my frock was awfully tight and wouldn't meet, and then, just when we succeeded in fastening it, one of the buttons went crack, and my maid had to hunt for a needle and thread to sew it on again."

Of course the soldier cousin was infinitely preferable to such a plain, unvarnished tale as that. Women were nowhere if they did not surround themselves with illusion. All admiration—all love was illusion really, only of a pleasant kind.

But if Bob had been annoyed by the delay, he was courtier enough not to show his vexation, and proved quite equal to the occasion. He declared to her ladyship that he would willingly have waited all day, if only to obtain a glimpse of her.

She smiled benevolently at him, pulled down the blinds three or four feet, seated herself with her back to the light, and motioned to him to occupy the vacant place on the sofa by her side. Evidently she was determined to make amends for having detained him so long.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEVELOPING PSYCHIC FORCE.

"THERE! Sit down, do," she exclaimed coaxingly. "You great tall men seem such a terribly long way off a poor little woman like me that I declare it's downright hard work having to crane one's neck up at you. For my part, I never can talk, unless a person be close to me."

"It assists conversation, certainly," said Bob. "I shouldn't think, though, that anybody could have the moral courage to place any great distance between himself and so charming a lady. I know I can't." And he plumped down almost on the top of the blue velvet skirt.

"Oh! you sad flatterer," she murmured coquettishly. "How am I to believe you?"

"By looking in the glass. Surely you see corroboration of the truth there."

"Yes, of several rather unpleasant ones," she thought to herself, but she did not say so aloud.

"And what have you been doing since we last met?" inquired Bob after a slight pause.

"I have gone through a variety of the most wonderful experiences, Mr. Jarrett; I feel as if I had only just begun to live, in the proper and enlightened sense of the word."

"Indeed! That sounds very mysterious. How did you make so remarkable a discovery?"

"Do you remember my telling you about my friend Mrs. St. John, and the *séance* that was to take place at her house?"

"Yes, perfectly. I have the keenest recollection of it," answered Bob.

"Well, I spent the most creepy, delightful, and blood-curdling evening I ever spent in my life, and all owing to that dear man, Monsieur Adolphe De Firdusi. Do you know him by any chance?"

"Not I. Who is he?"

"Impossible. You don't actually mean to say that you have not even heard of him. Well, you *are* behind the times."

"Very likely. It strikes me one would have to be uncommonly rapid to be before them now-a-days. But with all due respect to your ladyship, you have not yet gratified my curiosity."

"Adolphe De Firdusi—isn't it a romantic name? just the sort of name you expect great things of—is the head of the powerful modern school of electrical, esoteric and spiritualistic psychology."

"Dear me! And what wonders did this first-class conjuror perform?" ejaculated Bob.

"Elevations into space, even of common objects like a chair or a table," she responded in tones of intense excitement. "Mysterious rapping proceeding from the spirits with whom he holds communication, invisible writing, and many other marvellous manifestations besides. I confess that I went to my friend's house somewhat sceptically inclined, but I came away a complete convert."

"It's awful hard lines upon the poor spirits," said practical Bob.

"In what way, Mr. Jarrett?"

"Why, I fancy that one of the chief ideas of our mortal minds in connection with a future state is represented by repose. We associate the hereafter with rest and freedom from worry. Now, according to your friend Monsieur Adolphe, the unfortunate beings who have departed this world and gone to another, are little better off than general servants."

"Really, Mr. Jarrett. What extraordinary things you do say."

"Well, but is it not so? These poor spirits are at everybody's beck and call. A little shoeblack, cleaning his shoes in the gutter, displays mediumistic tendencies, and he may summon the celestial form; also the tradesman, also the farmer, also nine people out of ten. To me there is something revolting in the very idea."

"Ah!" sighed her ladyship. "You speak like one who does not understand. As Monsieur Adolphe truly observed the other

night, ignorance and dulness of the finer perceptions are our greatest enemies. I wish you could meet him. He would soon alter your opinions."

"I doubt it," said Bob obstinately.

"Oh! yes, indeed he would. No one can resist him. He has cultivated his soul to such an extent that he is now nothing but a mass of psychic force."

"I'm afraid I'm rather dense, but will you tell me exactly what those words mean? At present they convey nothing definite to my mind."

"Dear! how sad!" exclaimed Lady De Fochsey, clasping her hands theatrically.

"Is it? I look to you to enlighten me."

"Of course, 'psychic force' means ever so many things," she explained somewhat vaguely.

"All right," interposed Bob. "I'll take that for granted."

"And it is simply impossible to go into detail, when one is treating so stupendous a subject," she went on, wishing she could but recall some of Monsieur Adolphe's long words and high sounding phrases. "People must have faith—yes, faith first and foremost, and then it all comes to them in time."

"Again I must ask you to forgive my stupidity, but what comes, Lady De Fochsey."

"Oh! all sorts of things, as I told you before. It is so difficult to explain, but clairvoyance, and thought-reading, and—and spiritual interchanges with the souls of those who are dead."

"Very jolly if you met your dearest friend, but quite the reverse if some horrible wretch you were only too glad to get rid of kept always cropping up," said Bob. "Did you receive any messages from Monsieur Ad—I mean from the spirits."

"Yes, several."

"And what sort of messages were they?"

"Delightful ones. Hoped I was well, and looked forward to seeing me. One poor man I used to be very fond of in the olden days sent me quite a long letter; and, oh! so beautifully worded."

"It is curious that the language should be the same," remarked Bob. "Do the spirits ever make any mistakes in orthography?"

"How can you ask such a question? It's really quite shameful. I'll not tell you anything more if you talk like that."

"Oh! yes, do. I want to hear all about Monsieur Adolphe; I am an unbeliever now, I admit, but if any one can convert me, I feel sure you can." And, whether by accident or design, Bob's hand came in contact with Lady De Fochsey's, and she did not withdraw hers immediately.

"Ah!" she said, "I wish I were good at explaining things, but I'm not, although perhaps I may get to be a more worthy disciple by degrees, for Monsieur Adolphe says that if only I

cultivate my powers assiduously, and run up to town occasionally for the purpose of receiving his advice, in time I——”

All of a sudden she stopped short, and fixed her eyes rapturously upon Bob, with the air of one who has just made a great and exceedingly important discovery.

“What is the matter?” he asked, feeling rather uncomfortable at being stared at so pointedly.

“Just fancy!” she exclaimed ecstatically. “You are—yes, you really are——”

“I am—I really am—what?”

“A medium, my dear boy. Oh! you *lucky, lucky* young man, let me congratulate you.” And in her rapture, her golden head almost sank upon his shoulder, only, as one side of her fringe felt a little loose, she had to be careful, and he profited by the opportunity to edge a few inches farther away.

“Bah!” he exclaimed contemptuously, but not politely.

“Oh! it’s no use, saying ‘Bah!’” she rejoined. “The fact remains, and you can’t help yourself. You possess strong magnetic powers. I can tell by your eyes, though I don’t know yet whether you’ll develop into a medium of the first or only the second order. That depends chiefly upon yourself.”

“In that case I shan’t develop into either.”

“But you must. The process is unconscious, and it may so happen that your individual will has not much to do with it, especially if you come under the influence of a—of a——” but as she could not find the exact word, she broke off short, and said softly —“Oh! Mr Jarrett, I am so glad, so very, very glad. This was precisely what I wanted.”

“What are *you* glad about?” he asked somewhat roughly, beginning to wonder if she had gone off her head altogether.

“You don’t quite understand at present, but I’ll try and make it all clear to you. Monsieur Adolphe explained to me most particularly the system by which the magnetic current is transmitted. It is enough, he says, for two people who both possess spiritual aptitudes to meet once or twice a week, and sit for a couple of hours at a time, holding hands, and looking steadily into one another’s eyes, for them insensibly to gain power.”

“Good heavens!” ejaculated Bob. “What next, I wonder?”

“But the curious part is this,” resumed her ladyship, with a pensive smile. “It seems that the process is greatly assisted, and the cultivation of internal force immensely facilitated, when the two mediums are of opposite sexes. For instance—a man and a woman will arrive at much speedier results than a woman and a woman, or a man and a man.”

“Yes, I can understand that,” said Bob, with blunt sarcasm.

“Ah! you are beginning to comprehend at last,” she rejoined, in satisfied tones. “I thought you would before long. These things just require a little explanation at first starting, but they

are not as difficult as they seem, between two people who are really sympathetic."

"That's comforting, at any rate."

"Very, is it not? And now, Mr. Jarrett, what do you say? Will you try?"

"Try what, Lady De Fochsey? You speak in conundrums."

"Firstly, to develop your higher nature and kill the baser."

"Is that all? And pray, how am I to set about it?"

"I'll show you. You have only to do as I tell you."

So saying she jumped up from the sofa, dragged the cover off a small rosewood table that stood in the window, lifted it on to the hearthrug, and then proceeded to place two cane chairs one on either side of it.

Bob watched these operations with amazement.

"Now, sit down," she said impatiently.

He did as he was told, too much mystified to venture on an observation.

"That's right, Mr. Jarrett. Give me your two hands."

"Won't one do?"

"No, I must have both."

He held them out obediently, feeling somewhat like a captive.

"Now take mine in yours so, and press them firmly."

At this request Bob revived. He lost no time in complying with it. Indeed, he began to consider the situation great fun. They were quite close to each other, their knees almost touched, and only the small table separated them.

But her ladyship was not satisfied yet.

"Look straight into my eyes," she said, with preternatural gravity, "and after a time tell me what you see."

"There's no occasion to wait. I see a very pretty woman," replied Bob audaciously.

"Hush! You must not speak yet. It is too soon."

"How long am I to keep quiet? I never bargained for having to play mum-chance."

"You must judge by your own feelings; probably about a quarter of an hour."

"Very well," replied Bob. "But before we begin this game in earnest—for I presume it is a game—may I venture to make a suggestion?"

"Yes, if you are quick about it, but don't be long, for the conditions are favourable, and it's a thousand pities not to profit by them."

"From what I gather," said Bob gravely, "our present object is to strengthen and transmit the magnetic force which we—or rather you—believe we both possess. Now at this moment there is but one point of contact between us. The electric current passes through our hands, and our hands alone. Don't you think—I make this suggestion with all due diffidence—that if you

were to put out your pretty little feet and I were to put out mine, the effect might be enormously intensified? We should then secure a negative and a positive pole."

She sighed gently.

"Yes, Mr. Jarrett, per—perhaps you are right."

"I'm sure of it," said Bob confidently.

"And now to business," she said. "Keep on pressing my hands and looking into my eyes, and if, by the end of a quarter of an hour, you begin to feel peculiar sensations, swear to describe them, as I swear to describe mine. Only don't be disappointed if we fail to produce any active manifestations to-day, since it is absolutely necessary first to establish harmonious relations."

Bob laughed heartily.

"All right," he said. "Your orders shall be obeyed."

And then, for fifteen whole minutes neither of them spoke a word.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked away industriously and those two abominable pugs snored on louder than ever.

Now, to have free leave given you to press a pretty woman's hand, and a woman, moreover, not disinclined for flirtation, is a permission of which most men would take liberal advantage. To do Bob justice he was by no means backward in doing so. But squeezing hands surreptitiously and from impulse, and squeezing hands by command, are two very different things, as before long he began to discover. For when you are enjoined to continue the pressure at all hazards, then the temptation, and, *sub rosâ*, sense of enjoyment, vanishes, until in the end you become only conscious of an irksome effort. If any gentleman doubts this fact, let him try the experiment for himself.

For the first five minutes Bob's fancy was amazingly tickled. He discovered that the lid of one of Lady De Fochsey's eyes drooped more than the other, that the rims beneath them were not natural, and that the eyes themselves, when critically examined, were wholly wanting in expression. But the next five minutes, he began to feel rather bored, and suffered from an irresistible desire to yawn, which desire, however, he could not gratify, being unable to withdraw his hand. The last found him growling and grumbling inwardly, and voting the whole thing "a most deuced bore." He made a mental vow, never to squeeze a woman's hand as long as he lived. The nerves of his arm had grown quite dead. At length, to his infinite relief, the quarter struck.

"Well!" murmured Lady De Fochsey, who appeared in a dreamy and semi-hypnotic state. "How do you feel?"

"Oh! awfully jolly," responded Bob, not wholly veraciously, but thankful to be allowed the use of his tongue again. "How do you?"

"Strange—very strange. I have indescribable sensations. Do you see anything?"

"Rather," he answered, his sense of the ridiculous assuming the upper hand.

"Oh! what? Tell me what."

"I see"—and he lowered his voice to a mysterious key—"visions of fair disembodied women, floating about in spirit space. Waves of ether surround them. They are free from every coarse and earthly element——."

"Yes, yes, go on," she interrupted. "This is really wonderful, especially at the first attempt. It proves that you possess most special gifts."

"One gracious form beckons to me to draw near," continued Bob, still more dramatically. "She whispers that she has waited long, so long for my coming."

"Just like me," sighed her ladyship.

"Yes, just like you. She says that our communications require strengthening—that I am too far off. Ha! she bids me, with ethereal condescension, encircle her diaphanous and well-nigh invisible waist, with my grossly mortal arm." Here Bob proceeded to clasp Lady De Fochsey's tightly-laced one, the lady offering no resistance. How could she? When he was a medium, and was producing such lovely manifestations.

"My kindred spirit," she murmured, "my kindred spirit, at last—at last." Then, abandoning herself completely to the ecstasy of the moment, she added deliriously, "Is that all?"

"Oh! dear no. Would you believe it, my spiritual adviser actually commands me to press my mundane lips to her chaste ones. She does not even recoil from the thought of possible contamination, but offers me a draught of purest nectar."

To what length Bob's audacity and irrepressible spirit of mischief would have led him it is impossible to say. Suffice it, that his arm was still round her ladyship's waist and her head was within suspicious proximity to his own, when suddenly the door flew open, and Lord Littelbrane was announced.

The aspirants after psychic force started apart.

No further manifestations could be expected to take place in the presence of a third, and probably uncongenial, party.

Lady De Fochsey gave a little, startled scream, and alas! alas! the powerful electric current which had been so successfully established between herself and Mr. Jarrett was rudely broken.

But that it had been established was conclusively proved by the shock felt on either side at its unexpected and inopportune rupture.

None but male and female mediums could possibly have arrived at such sterling results in so short a space of time.

If the height of clairvoyance had been reached in one single *séance*, what might not be hoped for at the next meeting?

To the earnest believer in psychology, delightful and never-ending fields of research were open. Guided and impelled by the glorious spirit, the body might take care of itself. That vile earthly thing was of no account.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNTIMELY INTERRUPTION.

It took a good deal to disturb Lady De Fochsey's self-possession ; but for a few seconds after the announcement of Lord Littelbrane she was fairly staggered.

Her mind had been filled with all kinds of rare and transcendental ideas. It was uplifted and exalted in quite an uncommon degree. Her spirit was just ready to soar amongst astral planes and undertake a celestial voyage of discovery, and now, all of a sudden, she was called upon to attune herself to things terrestrial. It was like being bound by some horrid chain that rudely pulled you back to earth. Her discomfiture was increased, too, by the fact that, amongst the whole circle of her acquaintance, his lordship was the very last person whose presence she expected. No thought of him had entered her head ; for, although she had already spent two whole hunting seasons in Stiffshire, he had never once condescended to call, or to set foot inside her house ; and this in spite of sundry friendly little invitations issued by her in the beginning.

Beyond a few stereotyped remarks out hunting, confined almost exclusively to the weather and the sport, no civilities had been exchanged between them. After a time her innate sense had told her that this was a man on whom feminine fascinations and blandishments would produce but little effect. It was wiser to reserve them for a more sensitive and emotional individual.

So she had almost given up the attempt of trying to enrol his lordship amongst the list of her admirers, and contented herself with being on speaking terms—nothing more.

Consequently she was now at a loss to understand to what the honour of this visit was due. Her brain was too distraught to divine any possible motive.

But if, for once in her life, Lady De Fochsey felt slightly disconcerted, Lord Littelbrane was a hundred thousand times more so. His notions about ladies and their behaviour were strict, not to say old-fashioned, and he had seen enough to shock him very considerably. There could be no two opinions as to the familiarity of the positions in which the parties had been surprised. If he could have withdrawn without saying a word, most assuredly he would have done so. But it was too late now to effect an escape ; therefore, after an awkward pause, he advanced a little way into the room, and, turning very red in the face, said,

“I beg pardon. I fear I am intruding.”

At these words Lady De Fochsey called all her forces into action. She felt that the moment was critical—that, in fact, her whole character might depend upon it. A very pretty story could

doubtless be made at her expense, and circulated all over the hunting-field. In some way or other, she must account for the entire business, and in a manner, moreover, that would completely remove his lordship's displeasure. The task was by no means easy. There were a good many facts against her, but she did not despair. Her babyish blue eyes, and innocent pout, and childish speeches which professed no harm in anything had stood her in very good stead before now. Besides, in spite of his stiffness and reserve, she did not believe Lord Littelbrane to be either a very strong or a very acute man. She thought that it might not prove extremely difficult to throw dust in his eyes.

Therefore she held out her hand almost affectionately, and said with great apparent unconcern :

"Intruding? Oh! dear no. How could you possibly imagine such a thing, my lord? Mr. Jarrett and I were merely trying to repeat some spiritualistic experiments which I saw the other night, and which required a certain juxtaposition of the electrical forces."

She was very good at long words. She picked them up like a parrot, and introduced them regardless of their meaning. But they sounded well—learned, scientific and so on; and, to tell the truth, his lordship was a little impressed.

"Oh! indeed," he responded. "And are these experiments confined exclusively to yourself and this—" he was going to say gentleman, but checked himself and substituted "young man," without, however, deigning to look at Bob.

She smiled up into his face with the frankness of a child.

"Of course not. We were longing for a third person to assist our efforts. Will you join us?" and she smiled even more sweetly than before.

He was mollified, but not sufficiently so to accept the invitation.

"No, thank you. I am afraid your experiments are not much in my line."

She looked at him oddly, wickedly, alluringly.

"Oh! how cruel. Won't you even try?"

"Thanks; I think not. At all events," lowering his voice, "not in the present company."

"Ah, I understand. But," shrugging her shoulders "it was simply a case of *faute de mieux*."

"I'm glad to hear it. I feared it might be otherwise."

"What! with your experience?" Then she rested her hand on his coat-sleeve, and said in a louder key, "Dear Lord Littelbrane, you must really let me initiate you into some of the mysteries of the higher life. I do not profess to be an adept, but we might try and cultivate our souls together. I feel sure there is sympathy between us."

The last remnants of his ill-humour vanished. He felt infinitely flattered and raised in his own esteem. Only he could not unbend as long as that "duffer"—that nephew of Straightem's

remained in the room. He wondered why on earth the fellow did not go; and although he was not going to demean himself by talking to him, he might talk *at* him, and convey a pretty broad hint as to the desirability of his prompt departure.

"I think so also," he said, addressing Lady De Fochsey pointedly, "but sympathy requires a *tête-à-tête*. Don't you agree with me?"

"Ah! yes, of course. Do you hear that, Mr Jarrett?"

Bob marvelled inwardly at her impudence—"brass," he dubbed it mentally. But he had no desire to stay any longer and he scowled at by Lord Littelbrane, so he took up his hat, and, moving towards Lady De Fochsey, said abruptly:

"Good-bye. I must be going."

"Must you really?" she asked, in accents which seemed to say, "Quite right. I think you had much better, for you have had your innings and now should make room for another." Then, turning to Lord Littelbrane, she said:

"Excuse me one moment, my lord."

He bowed stiffly in response. Up till now he had resolutely abstained from taking the slightest notice of Bob, and desired to avoid an introduction, so he turned his back upon him and walked to the window, and stood gazing vacantly out at the green fields and browsing sheep.

Meantime Lady De Fochsey accompanied Bob to the door.

"Was there ever such an untimely interruption?" she whispered confidentially. "I declare I could have boxed his lordship's ears."

"Hush! he will hear you."

"I don't care if he does. He has spoilt our afternoon."

Bob could not help feeling rather disgusted with her hypocrisy. He was convinced in his own mind that no sooner did he leave the house than she would make up to Lord Littelbrane, precisely as she had made up to him.

"His coming was awkward, certainly," he admitted. "And I feel sorry on your account, as I fear you were placed in a rather disagreeable situation, and partly through my instrumentality."

"Oh! never mind about me, I'll soon smooth old 'Stick-in-the-mud' over. But, I say, Mr. Jarrett—Bob—I must call you Bob, Mr. Jarrett sounds so formal."

"Well, what is it, Lady De Fochsey?"

"You will keep our manifestations strictly secret, won't you? It would not be wise to mention them to an ignorant and unsympathetic public."

"Of course not," said Bob, repudiating the idea of recounting his folly. "You may trust me to hold my tongue; especially where so many universal truths are concerned."

"That's right. I knew I could depend on you; and, Bob—when will you come again?"

She might have been a girl of eighteen, proud in the possession

of her first lover and confident of her powers of attraction; but her eagerness repulsed him. It wanted the charm of extreme youth.

"I really can't say," he rejoined coldly. "It depends entirely on what's going on."

"Come soon, there's a dear creature. We ought to join hands again in three or four days' time at latest, else the magnetic current may evaporate."

"Perhaps it would be just as well to let it, all things considered."

"Nonsense. You must not talk like that. To-day's sitting has conclusively proved that we are indispensable to one another. You can only rise through my instrumentality, and I through yours. We have each a mission to perform, which should render us superior to personal feeling."

"And what will be the end of it all?" he inquired with languid interest.

"End? Why, in course of time we may be able to raise the chairs and tables from their places and suspend them in mid-air. We may get to hold an ordinary pencil in our hands, and find long spirit-messages written upon a slate; we may even see the forms of the departed hovering about our heads and whispering divine words of love and comfort. Surely you cannot entertain any doubts after the results we have obtained to-day? They were so absolutely conclusive."

"I don't know. They seemed to me to be purely mundane results at best. If they contained any divine element, the spirits must be very naughty people."

"That is because you have a mundane mind. We both have at present; but by degrees we shall grow out of all that, and disencumber ourselves of every earthly attribute."

"I doubt it," said Bob sceptically. "Earthly attributes have a nasty way of sticking."

And with that he effected his escape, and did not breathe freely until once more he found himself outside in the open air, inhaling the clear frosty atmosphere, instead of the languorous flower-laden perfumes of Lady De Fochsey's drawing-room.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, with a quick outward breath, as if to shake off every reminiscence of his visit, "was there ever such a pack of nonsense? Really, it makes one wonder what next women will be up to now-a-days. Every new craze, no matter how foolish, finds converts amongst the fair sex."

Then he walked on a step or two, and added, with a growing sense of self-dissatisfaction:

"I wonder what the deuce Dot would say if she knew what an infernal fool I've been making of myself. I shouldn't like her to hear how I've spent my Sunday afternoon."

Meanwhile Lady De Fochsey applied herself to the entertain-

ment of her remaining guest. He had felt annoyed by her prolonged conference with Bob, and she found him looking very cross and consequential, like a bird whose feathers have been ruffled the wrong way.

"Ten thousand pardons," she exclaimed in her prettiest and most penitent manner. "That young man promises to develop into a dreadful bore. He has fastened himself upon me, and really I hardly know how to get rid of him."

This was an entirely new aspect of affairs, and one infinitely more pleasing to Lord Littelbrane.

If what she stated was true, and she was being persecuted by an impudent stranger, he was more or less bound to step in and protect her from further inconvenience.

"You are much too good-natured," he said, "and should not allow yourself to be imposed upon."

She sighed, and drooped her eyes in a timid, feminine fashion she knew how to assume on occasions.

"Ah! Lord Littelbrane, your advice is excellent, no doubt; but what is a poor single woman in my position to do? She does not like to be downright rude, and yet on the other hand she is more or less at the mercy of every man she comes across."

"How did you first get to know this Mr. Jarrett?" he asked, seating himself in the place recently occupied by Bob.

"I met him out hunting. You remember the day he tumbled into the brook."

"Do you mean to say that he had the impertinence to speak to you?"

"I dropped my hunting crop and he opened a gate for me. I was obliged to say thank you!"

"And on the strength of that the fellow has actually had the cheek to come and call. Well! I never."

She did not contradict him, and left his lordship under the impression that Bob had forced his acquaintance upon her. It was a little mean, perhaps, not to tell the truth, but it saved an infinity of trouble; and really, if one were to try and stick up for all one's friends in their absence life would become a perfect burden. To be nice to them when they were present was the extent of what she could undertake.

"And what about this spiritualistic business?" inquired Lord Littelbrane suspiciously. "Did your friend Jarrett start the idea?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I proposed it at first in fun, and because I did not know what on earth to do with him. And then as you might have seen—but really I hardly like to tell you."

And she turned her head away coyly, and gazed pensively at one little slippered foot.

"Yes, yes, go on," entreated her companion, whose curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

"Well, then, the young man grew shockingly familiar. I was just going to ring the bell and bid the servant show him out, when you came in. You may imagine my feelings of relief."

This was a very strange story, concocted on the spur of the moment, but, stranger still, Lord Littelbrane believed it. From that instant he saw before him a beautiful and injured woman, whose natural modesty had been grossly outraged.

"Next time I meet the brute I'll punch his head," he exclaimed vindictively, knowing, however, that he would do no such thing, except by deputy.

"Oh! No, indeed, my lord, you must not be so fierce. Mr. Jarrett misconducted himself a little certainly, but then you see he is a medium, and mediums are always entitled to a certain licence."

"H'm! And pray how do you get to be a medium?"

"In a great many different ways."

"Do you think you could make me one? I should rather like to acquire a few privileges in your case."

"I don't know. I've never had the chance of ascertaining whether I could or whether I couldn't."

"Will you try, Lady De Fochsey?"

He spoke so gravely that she suspected some serious intention.

"With pleasure, my lord, provided you really wish it."

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

THESE early days of spring-like weather, when the air is warm and balmy and the birds begin to sing, would be almost too exhilarating after our long and dreary winter, were it not that they bring with them an inevitable sense of lassitude that makes the smallest task seem burdensome. We begin the day with a delighted sense of emancipation from gloom and numbing cold, and a sort of multiplied enjoyment of not only this one spring morning, but of all the beautiful ones to follow it; but as the hours wear on energy droops and disappears, and we find that the apparently exhaustless fund with which we seemed provided when we rose has run low indeed, and we are victims to an enervating sensation of dreamy languor. But with it all, spring is delightful, and but for the east winds, would be the loveliest time of all the year.

The principal dramatic event of the month has been the production of "The Pompadour" at the Haymarket by Mr. Beerbohm Tree, who throws so much well-directed energy into every undertaking. The play is a great success, and to the women of the audience the dramatic interest is fairly divided with the millinerial. Mrs. Beerbohm Tree looks so charming in her Louis Quinze gowns that they will be likely to influence the fashions just as Madame Bernhardt's have done in "La Tosca" in Paris. The succession of scenes are beautifully arranged, and all London is rushing to see the Watteau ballet and the gavotte of swords.

"Christina," at the Olympic, is a success such as this rather unlucky theatre has not beheld for some years. One great secret of this success lies in the judgment exhibited in casting the play. Even the smallest parts are well played. Mr. Willard is the recipient of almost frantic applause every night. One of the daily papers has christened him "our champion villain," and he well deserves a title which, in other circumstances, might prove anything but flattering. Mr. Frank Archer plays the part of the editor of a society journal with his usual thoroughness. The authors ought to feel grateful to him for the way in which he gives point to every word intrusted to him to say. Not a syllable is lost in this actor's capable hands. He is one of the few who thoroughly study their art and completely master its methods.

Miss Alma Murray, as Christina, charms her audience. This clever actress has never been seen to better advantage.

We are all looking forward to the production of Mr. Wilson Barrett's new play, "The Ben-machree," which is Manx for "The Girl of my Heart." It is to be an exciting play, and from all I hear of it, contains every element of popularity.

"Ariane" is still drawing crowded houses at the Opera Comique. Mrs. Bernard-Beere liberally paid her whole company full salaries for Holy Week, though the theatre had not been opened, and she herself had been in Paris looking after a new play. It is not often that one has the pleasure of recording such generous deeds as this.

What are the Gaiety mashers to do without Miss Nellie Farren? Will they, from mere force of habit, wend their nightly way to the Gaiety, as did the laird to the cottage of Jeanie Deans when she had gone from it? Who will ever forget his "Hech, sirs!" addressed to no audience, as the sad truth burst upon him evening after evening. The Gaiety youth will not say, "Hech, sirs," but probably something very much stronger than the gentle utterance of Jeanie's laird.

"The Wife's Secret," at the St. James', gives Miss Fanny Brough another opportunity of proving how clever she is in comedy. The play itself is not precisely adapted to popularity, but the manner in which it is put on the stage and the charm of Mrs. Kendal's acting are sufficient to play the part of magnet to the London public.

At the Savoy, the reproduction of "The Pirates of Penzance" is welcomed by nightly audiences in a way that proves the wisdom of the management in allowing it to revisit the glimpses of the electric light. The quality of the Gilbertian humour is by no means of the evanescent order, relying on something very different from distorted puns and allusions to topics of the hour.

Mr. Irving and Miss Ellen Terry were the recipients of the usual ovation on the occasion of their reappearance at the Lyceum on the 14th, after their enormously successful American trip. Mr. Irving's programme of coming events is an interesting and attractive one.

"Sweet Lavender" is a play that must not be missed by even the most flying visitor to town. Miss Maud Millett is delicious in her part of a fresh, ingenuous, good-hearted and sensible English girl, and Mr. Edward Terry has never been better fitted dramatically. It is a touching and yet a cheerful play, a delightful and not at all a usual combination.

Miss Fortescue is universally acknowledged by the critics to have made a wonderful advance in her profession. Her Julia, played at a *matinée* a short time ago, evidenced much careful study and the studious "thinking out" of a part in all its details that is part of the very soul of acting. This young lady, with her beautiful, refined face, charm of manner, and cultivated intellect,

is on the way to become resplendent among the stars of the dramatic firmament.

Those who love a hearty laugh must go to see "Airey Annie" at the Strand, but not till they have visited "Ariane" at the Opera Comique. Mr. Burnand has produced one of the funniest burlesques imaginable in "Airey Annie," and the perfect manner in which each part is played renders the whole performance one of the best to be seen in town just now. Miss Ayrton's caricature of Mrs. Bernard-Beere is marvellously and minutely clever. The good-natured original is said to have been immensely amused by it, and M. Marius coached his imitator himself. This sort of reception of caricature upon oneself takes from them any suspicion of bad taste. All London is rushing to see "Airey Annie," the poodle and the child.

Mr. Toole has secured another successful comedy in "The Don," from the united pens of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Merivale. His adventures as a don are as amusing as, and perhaps in a tiny degree more probable than, those he underwent as a butler. Pretty Miss Violet Vanbrugh, with bright-faced Miss Marie Linden and the piquante Miss Kate Phillips, form a trio of attractiveness in the ladies' parts, which the popular Miss E. Thorne converts to a quartette.

"A Run of Luck," at Old Drury, must not be missed, nor "Nita's First," at the Novelty, under the management of Mr. George Giddens, who has sustained such a severe loss in the sudden death of Mr. W. J. Hill. The variety of Mr. George Giddens' dramatic talent has by no means been recognized as yet. The play is farcically funny.

The many friends of Mrs. Arthur Stannard (John Strange Winter) and the numerous public that has read her books, are equally looking forward to the production of "Bootles' Baby" at the Royalty, under the direction of Mr. Edgar Bruce. A military play is always popular, and in this instance there are many other good reasons for predicting success.

Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's new book about themselves will be read everywhere with delighted interest. It is written in a style that is charmingly natural, and which, indeed, exactly matches Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's method on the stage. We hardly realize as yet how much we owe to them as having revolutionized the stage. Before their time the dramatic drawing-room was as barren of refinement as the people who sat in it. The "gentlemen" were as shaky about their English, for the greater part, as they were loud and decided in their dress. The ladies matched the gentlemen. Now we hear the refined tones, the delicate articulation, and the soft laughter to which we are accustomed in real life; while the eyes detect neither staginess in the dresses, nor stale flatness in the furniture. Old playgoers can well recollect the dreadful "drawing-room" of comedy some years ago. A suite of

furniture backed up against the wall was the principal item. Two of the smaller chairs were generally brought forward near the footlights for the *dramatis personæ* to sit upon while they emitted dialogue. A mirror that reflected nothing, for excellent reasons, adorned the chimney-piece, and the walls were hideous beyond comment. Now the critics have to warn the managers against over-elaboration in matters of this sort. Much of this change for the better, and very much more than this, we owe to the Bancrofts and the new order of things they initiated at the well-remembered little house in Tottenham Street, where some of us once passed such happy hours, under the magic of Marie Wilton's sweet voice, contagious laughter, and still more infectious tears.

LONDON SOCIETY.

JUNE, 1888.

THE FATAL THREE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL," "LIKE AND UNLIKE,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

Book the Second.

LACHESIS, OR THE BEGINNING OF DOOM.

CHAPTER I.

A WIFE AND NO WIFE.

MR. CASTELLANI'S existence was one of those social problems about which the idle world loves to speculate. There are a good many people in London to whom the idea of a fourth dimension is not half so interesting as the notion of a man who lives by his wits, and yet contrives to get himself dressed by a good tailor, and to obtain a footing in some of the best houses at the smart end of the town. This problem César Castellani had offered to the polite world of London for the last three seasons.

Who is Mr. Castellani, was a question still asked by a good many people who invited the gentleman to their houses, and made much of his talents. He had not forced an entrance into society; nobody had ever denounced him as a pushing person. He had slid so insidiously into his place in the social orbit that people had not yet left off wondering how he came there, or who had been his sponsors. This kind of speculation always stimulates the invention of the clever people; and these affected to know a good deal more about Mr. Castellani than he knew about himself.

"He came with magnificent credentials, and an account was opened for him at Coutts's before he arrived," said Magnus

Dudley, the society poet, flinging back his long hair with a lazy movement of the large languid head. "Of course you know that he is a natural son of Cavour's?"

"Indeed—no—I never heard *that*. He is not like Cavour."

"Of course not, but he is the image of his mother—one of the handsomest women in Italy—a duchess, and daughter of a Roman nobleman who could trace his descent in a clear line from the Imperial house. Castellani has the blood of Germanic in his veins."

"He looks like it; but I have heard on pretty good authority that he is the son of a Neapolitan music master."

"There are people who will tell you his father wheeled a barrow and sold penny ices in Whitechapel," retorted Magnus. "People will say anything."

Thus and in much otherwise did society speculate; and in the meantime Mr. Castellani's circle was always widening. His book had been just audacious enough and just clever enough to make its mark. "*Nepenthe*" had been one of the successes of the season before last, and Mr. Castellani was henceforth to be known as the author of "*Nepenthe*." He had touched upon many things below the stars, and some things beyond them. He had written of other worlds with the confidence of a man who had been there. He had written of women with the air of a *Café de Paris* Solomon; and of men with the tone of a person who had never met one.

A man who could write a successful book, and could play and sing divinely, was a person to be cultivated in feminine society. Very few men cared to be intimate with Mr. Castellani; but among women his influence was indisputable. He treated them with a courtly deference which charmed them, and he made them his slaves. No Oriental despot ever ruled more completely than César Castellani did in half-a-dozen of those drawing-rooms which give the tone to scores of other drawing-rooms between Mayfair and Earl's Court. He contrived to be in request from the dawn to the close of the London season; he had made a favour of going to Riverdale; and now, although it suited his purpose to be there, he made a favour of his prolonged visit.

"If it were not for the delight of being here I should be in one of the loneliest valleys in the Tyrol," he told Mrs. Hillersdon. "I have never stayed in England so long after the end of the season. A wild longing to break loose from the bonds of Philistinism generally seizes me at this time of year. I want to go away, and away, and ever away from my fellow men. I should like to go and live in a tomb, like Ouida's Italian heroine. My thirst for solitude is almost a disease."

This from a man who spent the greater part of his existence dawdling in drawing-rooms and boudoirs sounded paradoxical; but paradoxes are accepted graciously from a man who has written the book of the season. Louise Hillersdon treated Castellani like

a favourite son. At his bidding she brought out the old guitar, which had slumbered in its case for nearly a decade, and sang the old Spanish songs, and struck the strings with the old dashing sweep of the taper hand and graceful curve of the rounded arm.

"When you sing I could believe you any age you like to call yourself," said Castellani, lolling along the sofa beside the low chair in which she was sitting; "I cease even to envy the men who knew you when you were a girl."

"My dear Castellani, I feel old enough to be your grandmother; unless you are really the person I sometimes take you for——"

"Who is that?"

"The Wandering Jew."

"No matter what my creed or where I have wandered, since I am so happy as to find a haven here. Granted that I can remember Nero's beautiful Empress, and Faustina, and Mary of Scotland, and Emma Hamilton, and all that procession of fair women who illumine the dark ages—blonde and brunette, pathetic and *espiègle*, every type and every variety. It is enough for me to find perfection here."

"If you only knew how sick I am of that kind of nonsense," said Mrs. Hillersdon, smiling at him half in amusement, half in bitterness.

"Oh, I know that you have drunk the wine of praise and worship to satiety. Yet if you and I had lived upon the same plane, I would have taught you that among a hundred adorers one could love you better than all the rest. But it is too late. Our souls may meet and touch perhaps in a new incarnation."

"Do you talk this kind of nonsense to Mrs. Greswold—or her niece?"

"No; with them I am all dulness and propriety. There is nothing *simpatica* in either of them. Miss Ransome is a frank, good-natured girl—much too frank—with all the faults of her species. I find the average girl always detestable."

"Miss Ransome has about fifteen hundred a year. I suppose you know that?"

"Has she really? If ever I marry I hope to do better than that," answered César, with delightful insolence. "She would be a very nice match for a country parson—that Mr. Rollinson, for instance, who is getting up the concert."

"Then Miss Ransome is not your attraction at Enderby. It is Mrs. Greswold who draws you."

"Why should I be drawn?" he asked, with his languid air. "I go there in sheer idleness. They like to hear me play or sing; they fool me and praise me; and it is nice to be fooled by two pretty women."

"Does Mrs. Greswold take any part in the fooling? She looks like marble."

"There is flame under that marble. Mrs. Greswold is roman-

tically in love with her husband ; but that is a complaint which is not incurable."

"He is not an agreeable man," said Louise, remembering how long George Greswold and his wife had held themselves aloof from her. "And he does not look like a happy man."

"He is not happy."

"You know something about him—more than we all know?" asked Louise, with keen curiosity.

"Not much. I met him at Nice before he came into his property. He was not a very fortunate person at that time, and he doesn't care to be reminded of it now."

"Was he out-at-elbows, in debt?"

"Neither. His troubles did not take that form. But I am not a gossip. Let the past be past, as Goethe says. We can't change it ; and it is charity to forget it. If we are not sure about what we touch, and hear, and see—or fancy we hear, and touch, and see—in the present, how much less can we be sure of any reality of external existence in the past? It is all done away with—vanished. How can we know that it ever was? A grave here and there is the only witness, and even the grave and the name on the head-stone may be only a projection of our own consciousness. We are such stuff as dreams are made of."

"That is a politely circuitous manner of refusing to tell me anything about Mr. Greswold—when his name was Ransome. No matter. I shall find other people to tell me the scandal, I have no doubt. Your prevarication assures me that there was a scandal."

This was on the eve of the concert at Enderby, at about the same hour when George Greswold showed Mildred his first wife's portrait. Castellani and his hostess were alone together in the lady's morning room, while Hillersdon and his other guests were in the billiard room on the opposite side of a broad corridor. Mrs. Hillersdon had a way of turning over her visitors to her husband when they bored her. Gusts of noise and laughter came across the corridor now and again, as they played pool. There were times when Louise was too tired of life to endure the burden of commonplace society. She liked to dream over a novel. She liked to talk with a clever young man like Castellani. His flatteries amused her, and brought back a faint flavour of youth, a dim remembrance of the day when all men had praised her, when she had known herself secure in the pre-eminence of her charms, without a rival. Now other women were beautiful, and she was only a tradition. She had toiled hard to live down her past, to make the world forget that she had ever been Louise Lorraine ; yet there were moments in which she felt angry to find that old personality of hers so utterly forgotten, when she was tempted to cry out, "What rubbish you talk about your Mrs. Egremont, your Mrs. Linley Varden, your professional beauties, and fine lady actresses. Have you never heard of me—Louise Lorraine?"

The drawing-rooms at Enderby Manor had been so transformed under Mr. Castellani's superintendence, and with the help of his own dexterous hands, that there was a unanimous expression of surprise from the county families as they entered that region of subdued light and æsthetic draperies, between three and half-past three o'clock on the afternoon of the concert.

The Broadwood grand stood on a platform in front of a large bay window, draped as no other hand could drape a piano, with dark Oriental curtains and Algerian fabrics, striped with gold, and against the sweeping folds of richest colour rose a group of tall golden lilies out of a great yellow vase, one of Minton's *chefs d'œuvre*. More flowers were massed near the end of the piano, and a few of the most artistic chairs in the house were placed about for the performers. The platform, instead of being as other platforms, in a straight line across one side of the room, was placed diagonally, so as to present the more picturesque effect of an angle in the background, an angle lighted with tall lamps and clusters of wax candles, a stage which looked like a shrine.

All the windows had been darkened, save those in the further drawing-room, which opened into the garden, and even these were shaded by Spanish hoods, letting in coolness and the scent of flowers, but little daylight. Thus the only vivid light was on the platform.

The auditorium was arranged with a certain artistic carelessness; the chairs in curved lines to accommodate the diagonal line of the platform, and this fact, in conjunction with the prettiness of the stage, put every one in a good temper before the concert began.

The concert was as other concerts, clever amateur singing, decent amateur playing, fine voices cultivated to a certain point, and stopping just short of perfect training.

César Castellani's three little songs—words by Heine, setting by Schubert and Jensen—were the hit of the afternoon. There were few eyes that were unclouded by tears, even among those listeners to whom the words were in an unknown language. The pathos was in the voice of the singer.

The duet was performed with aplomb, and elicited an encore, on which Pamela and Castellani sang the old-fashioned "Flow on, thou shining river," which pleased elderly people, moving them like a reminiscence of long vanished youth.

Pamela's heart beat furiously as she heard the applause, and she courtesied herself off the platform in a whirl of delight. She felt that it was in her to be a great public singer—a second Patti—if—if she could be taught and trained by Castellani. Her head was full of vague ideas—a life devoted to music—three years' hard study in Italy—a *début* at La Scala—a world-wide renown achieved in a single night. She even wondered how to Italianize her name. Ransomini? No, that would hardly do. Pamelani—Pameletta? What awkward names they were—Christian and surname both.

And then, crimsoning at the mere thought, she saw herself announced in large letters—

MADAME CASTELLANI.

How much easier to make a great name in the operatic world with a husband to fight one's battles and get the better of managers!

"With an income of one's own it ought to be easy to make one's way," thought Pamela, as she stood behind the long table in the dining-room, dispensing tea and coffee, with the assistance of maids and footmen.

Her head was so full of these bewildering visions that she was a little less on the alert than she ought to have been for shillings and half-crowns, insomuch that a few elderly ladies got their tea and coffee for nothing, not being asked for payment, and preferring to consider the entertainment gratis.

Mildred's part of the concert was performed to perfection—not a false note in an accompaniment, or a single fault in the *tempo*. Lady Millborough, a very difficult and exacting personage, declared she had never been so well supported in her *cheval de bataille*, the grand scena in "La Gazza Ladra." But many among the audience remarked that they had never seen Mrs. Greswold look so ill, and both Mr. Rollinson and Mr. Castellani were seriously concerned about her.

"You are as white as marble," said the Italian. "I know you are suffering."

"I assure you it is nothing. I have not been feeling very well lately, and I had a sleepless night. There is nothing that need give any one the slightest concern. You may be sure I shall not break down. I am very much interested in the painted window," she added with a faint smile.

"It is not for our concert that I fear," said Castellani, in a lower voice. "It is of you—and your suffering that I am thinking."

George Greswold did not appear at the concert. He was engaged elsewhere.

"I cannot think how Uncle George allowed himself to have an appointment at Salisbury this afternoon," said Pamela. "I know he dotes on music."

"Perhaps he doesn't dote upon it quite so well as to like to see his house turned topsy-turvy like this," said Lady Millborough, who would have seen every philanthropic scheme in the county collapse for want of funds rather than have allowed her own sacred drawing-room to be pulled about by amateur scene-shifters.

Mrs. Hillersdon and her party occupied a prominent position near the platform; but that lady was too clever to make herself conspicuous. She talked to the people who were disposed to friendliness—their numbers had increased with the advancing

years—and she placidly ignored those who still held themselves aloof from “that horrid woman.” Nor did she in any way appropriate Castellani as her special *protégé* when the people round her were praising him. She took everything that happened with the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and which may often be found among women whom the Vere de Veres despise.

All was over; the last of the carriages had rolled away. Castellani had been carried off in Mrs. Hillersdon’s barouche, no one inviting him to stay at the Manor House. Mr. Rollinson lingered to repeat his effusive thanks for Mrs. Greswold’s help.

“It has been a glorious success,” he exclaimed; “glorious. Who would have thought there was so much amateur talent available within thirty miles? And Castellani was a grand acquisition. We shall clear about seventy pounds for the window. I don’t know how I can ever thank you enough for giving us the use of your lovely rooms, Mrs. Greswold, and for letting us pull them about as much as we liked.”

“That did not matter—much,” Mildred said faintly, as she stood on the threshold of the hall door in the evening light, the curate lingering to reiterate the assurance of his gratitude. “Everything can be arranged again—easily.”

She was thinking, with a dull aching at her heart, that to her the pulling about and disarrangement of those familiar rooms hardly mattered at all. They were her rooms no longer. Enderby was never more to be her home. It had been her happy home for thirteen gracious years—years clouded with but one natural sorrow, in the loss of her beloved father. And now that father’s ghost rose up before her, a pale and awful figure, and said, “The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, and because of my sin you must go forth from the home you love and forsake the husband of your heart.”

She gave the curate an icy-cold hand, and turned from him without another word.

“Poor soul, she is dead beat,” thought Mr. Rollinson, as he trudged home to his lodgings over a joiner and builder’s shop, airy and comfortable rooms enough, but odorous with the scent of sawdust, and noisy with the noise of carpenter’s work.

He could but think it odd that he had not been asked to stay and dine, as he would have been in the ordinary course of events. He had told the builder’s wife that he should most likely dine out, whereupon that friendly soul had answered, “Why, of course they’ll ask you, Mr. Rollinson; they’re always glad to see you.”

And now he had to go home to solitude and a fresh-killed chop.

It was seven o’clock, and George Greswold had not yet come home from Salisbury. Very few words had passed between him and his wife since she fell fainting at his feet last night. He had summoned her maid, and between them they had brought her back to consciousness and half carried her to her room. She

would give no explanation of her fainting fit when the maid had left the room, and she was lying on her bed, white and calm, with her husband sitting by her side. She told him that she was tired, and that a sudden giddiness had come upon her. That was all he could get from her.

"If you will ask me no questions, and leave me quite alone, I will try to sleep, so that I may be fit for my work in the concert to-morrow," she pleaded. "I would not disappoint them for worlds."

"I don't think you need be over anxious about them," said her husband bitterly. "There is more at stake than a painted window; there is your peace and mine. Answer me only one question," he said, with intensity of purpose; "had your fainting fit anything to do with the portrait of my first wife?"

"I will tell you everything—after the concert to-morrow," she answered; "for God's sake leave me to myself till then."

"Let it be as you will," he answered, rising suddenly, offended by her reticence.

He left the room without another word. She sprang up from her bed directly he was gone, ran to the door and locked it, and then flung herself on her knees upon the prie-Dieu chair at the foot of a large carved ivory crucifix which hung in a deep recess beside the old-fashioned fire-place.

Here she knelt, at intervals, in tears and prayer half through the night. At other times she walked up and down the room, absorbed in thought, by the dim light of the night lamp.

When the morning light came she went to a bookcase in a little closet of a room opening out of the spacious old bedroom, a case containing only devotional books, and of these she took out volume after volume—"Taylor's Rule of Conscience," "Hooker's Religious Polity," Butler, Paley—one after another, turning over the leaves, looking through the indexes—searching for something which she seemed unable to find anywhere.

"What need have I to see what others have thought?" she said to herself at last after repeated failure, "*he* knows the right. I could have no better guide than his opinion, and he has spoken. What other law do I need? His law is the law of God."

Not once did her eyes close in sleep all through that night, or in the sunny morning hours before breakfast. She made an excuse for breakfasting in her dressing-room, a large, airy apartment, half boudoir. She was told that Mr. Greswold had gone out early to see some horses at Salisbury, and would not be back till dinner time. He was to be met at the station at half-past seven.

She had her morning to herself to do what she liked with it. Pamela was rehearsing her part in the duet, and in "Flow on thou shining river," which was to be sung should there be an encore. That occupation, and the arrangement of her toilet,

occupied the young lady till luncheon—allowing for half-hourly rushes about the lawn and shrubberies with Box, whose health required activity, and whose social disposition insisted upon companionship.

“He can’t get on with only Kassandra. She hasn’t intellect enough for him,” said Pamela.

It was only ten minutes before the arrival of the performers that Mrs. Greswold went down stairs, pale as ashes but ready for the ordeal. She had put on a white gown with a little scarlet ribbon about it, lest black should make her pallor too conspicuous.

And now it was nearly seven o’clock, and she was alone. The curate had been right in pronouncing her dead beat, but she had some work before her yet. She had been writing letters in the morning. Two of these she now placed on the mantelpiece in her bedroom; one addressed to her husband, the other to Pamela.

She had a bag packed—not one of those formidable dressing bags which weigh fifteen to twenty pounds, but a light Russia leather bag, just large enough to contain the essentials of the toilet. She put on a neat little black bonnet and a travelling cloak, and took her bag and umbrella, and went down to the hall. She had given orders that the carriage should call for her before going to the station, and she was at the door ready to step into it when it came round.

“Put me down at Ivy Cottage, Brown,” she said to the coachman, and was driven off unseen by the household, who were all indulging in a prolonged talk and tea drinking after the excitement of the concert.

Ivy Cottage was within five minutes’ walk of Romsey Station, a little red cottage, newly built, with three or four ivy plants languishing upon a slack-baked brick wall, and just enough garden for the proverbial cat to disport himself in at his ease—the swinging of cats being no longer an English sport. There was nothing strange in Mrs. Greswold alighting at Ivy Cottage—unless it were the hour of her visit—for the small brick box was occupied by two maiden ladies of small means, one a confirmed invalid, the other her constant and patient nurse, whom the lady of Enderby Manor often visited, and in whom she was known to be warmly interested.

Brown, the coachman, concluded that his mistress was going to spend a quarter of an hour with the two old ladies, while he went on and waited for his master at the station, and that he was to call for her on his return. He did not even ask for her orders upon this point, taking the thing for granted.

He was ten minutes too soon at the station, as every well-conducted coachman ought to be, lest, by leaving no margin for accidents, he should be too late.

"I'm to call for my mistress, sir," he said, as Mr. Greswold stepped into the brougham.

"Where?"

"At Ivy Cottage, sir; Miss Fishers'."

"Very good."

The brougham pulled up at Ivy Cottage; and the groom got down and knocked a resounding peal upon the Queen Anne knocker.

Hardly possible now-a-days to find a knocker that is not after the style of Queen Anne, or a newly-built twenty-five-pound-a-year cottage in any part of England that does not offer a faint reminiscence of Bedford Park.

The groom made his inquiry of the startled little maid-of-all-work, fourteen years old last birthday, and already aspiring to better herself as a vegetable maid in a nobleman's family.

Mrs. Greswold had not been at Ivy Cottage that evening.

George Greswold was out of the brougham by this time, hearing the girl's answer.

"Stop where you are," he said to the coachman, and ran back to the station, an evil augury in his mind.

He went to the up-platform, the platform at which he had alighted ten minutes before.

"Did you see Mrs. Greswold here just now?" he asked the station-master, with as natural an air as he could command.

"Yes, sir. She got into the up-train, sir; the train by which you came. She came out of the waiting-room, sir, the minute after you left the platform. You must just have missed her."

"Yes, I have just missed her."

He walked up and down the length of the platform two or three times in the thickening dusk. Yes, he had missed her. She had left him. Such a departure could mean only severance—some deep wound, which it might take long to heal. It would all come right by-and-by. There could be no such thing as parting between man and wife who loved each other as they loved—who were incapable of falsehood or wrong.

What was this jealous fancy that had taken possession of her, this unappeasable jealousy of the dead past—a passion so strong that it had prompted her to rush away from him in this clandestine fashion, to torture him by all the evidences of an inconsolable grief? His heart was heavy as despair itself as he went back to the carriage, helpless to do anything except go to his deserted home, and see if any explanation awaited him there.

It was half-past eight when the carriage drove up to the Manor House. Pamela ran out into the hall to receive him.

"How late you are, uncle," she cried, "and I can't find aunt. Everything is at sixes and sevens. The concert was a prodigious success—and—only think—I was encored!"

"Indeed, dear?"

"Yes, my duet with him: and then we sang the other. They would have liked a third, only we pretended not to understand. It would have made all the others so fearfully savage if we had taken it."

This speech was not particularly lucid, but it might have been clearer and yet unintelligible to George Greswold.

"Do you mind eating your dinner alone to-night, my dear Pamela?" he said, trying to speak cheerily. "Your aunt is out—and I—I have some letters to write, and I lunched heavily at Salisbury."

His heavy luncheon had consisted of a biscuit and a glass of bitterale at the station. His important business had been a long ramble on Salisbury Plain, alone with his own troubled thoughts. The horses were purely imaginary.

"Did your mistress leave any message for me?" he asked the butler.

"No, sir. Nobody saw my mistress go out. When Louisa went up to dress her for dinner she was gone, sir—but Louisa said there was a letter for you on the bedroom mantelpiece. Shall I send for it, sir?"

"No, no—I will go myself. Serve dinner at once. Miss Ransome will dine alone."

George Greswold went to the bedroom—that fine old room, the real Queen Anne room, with thick walls and deep-set windows, and old window seats, and capacious recesses on each side of the high oak chimney-piece, and richly-moulded wainscote, and massive panelled doors amidst which it is a privilege to exist—a spacious, sober old room, with old Dutch furniture, of the pre-Chippendale era, and early English china, Worcester simulating oriental, Chelsea striving after Dresden: a glorious old room, solemn and mysterious as a church in the dim light of two wax candles which Louisa the maid had lighted on the mantelpiece.

There, between the candles, appeared the two letters. "George Greswold, Esq." "Miss Ransome."

The husband's letter was a thick one, and the style of the penmanship showed how the pen had hurried along, driven by the electric forces of excitement and despair.

"MY BELOVED,

"You asked me last night if the photograph which you showed me had anything to do with my fainting fit. It had everything to do with it. That photograph is a portrait of my unhappy sister, my cruelly-used, unacknowledged sister; and I, who have been your wife fourteen years, know now that our marriage was against the law of God and man—that I have never been legally your wife—that our union from the first has been an unholy union, and for that unlawful marriage the hand of God has

been laid upon us—heavily—heavily—in chastisement, and the darling of our hearts has been taken from us.

“‘Whom He loveth He chasteneth.’ He has chastened us, George—perhaps to draw us nearer to Him. We were too happy, it may be, in this temporal life—too much absorbed by our own happiness, living in a charmed circle of love and gladness, till that awful chastisement came.

“There is but one course possible to me, my dear and honoured husband, and that course lies in life-long separation. I am running away from my dear home like a criminal, because I am not strong enough to stand face to face with you and tell you what must be. We must do our best to live out our lives asunder, George—we must never meet again as wedded lovers—such as we have been for fourteen years. God knows my affection for you has grown and strengthened with every year of union; and yet it seems to me on looking back that my heart went out to you in all the fulness of an infinite love when first we stood, hand clasped in hand, beside the river. If you are angry with me, George—if you harden your heart against me because I do that which I know to be my duty, at least believe that I never loved you better than in this bitter hour of parting. I spent last night in prayer and thought. If there were any way of escape—any possibility of living my own old happy life with a clear conscience, I think God would have shown it to me in answer to my prayers; but there was no ray of light, no gleam of hope. Conscience answers sternly and plainly. By the law of God I have never been your wife, and His law commands me to break an unhallowed tie, although my heart may break with it.

“Do you remember your argument with Mr. Cancellor? I never saw you so vehement in any such dispute, and you took the side which I can but think the side of the Evil One. That conversation now seems to me like a strange foreshadowing of sorrow—a lesson meant for my guidance. Little did I then think that this question could ever have any bearing on my own life; but I recall every word now, and I remember how earnestly my old master spoke—how fearlessly he held to the right. Can I doubt his wisdom, from whose lips I first learned the Christian law, and in whom I first saw the Christian life.

“I have written to Pamela begging her to stay with you, to take my place in the household, and to be to you as an adopted daughter. May God be merciful to us both in this heavy trial, George. Be sure He will deal with us mercifully if we do our duty according to the light that is given to us.

“I shall stay to-night in Queen Anne’s gate with Mrs. Tomkison. Please send Louisa to me to-morrow with luggage for a long absence from home. She will know what to bring. You can tell her that I am going abroad for my health. My intention is to go to some small watering place in France or Germany, where I can

vegetate, away from all beaten tracks, and from the people who know us. You may rely upon me to bear my own burden, and to seek sympathy and consolation from no earthly comforter.

"Do not follow me, George—should your heart urge you to do so. Respect my solemn resolution, the result of many prayers.

"Your ever loving,

"MILDRED."

CHAPTER II.

SOONER OR LATER.

GEORGE GRESWOLD read his wife's letter a second time with increasing perplexity and trouble of mind. Her sister! What could this mean? She had never told him of the existence of a sister. She had been described by her father, by every one, as an only child. She had inherited the whole of her father's fortune.

"Her cruelly-used, unacknowledged sister."

Those words indicated a social mystery; and as he read and re-read those opening lines of his wife's letter he remembered her reticence about that girl-companion from whom she had been parted so early. He remembered her sudden blush, and confused air, when he questioned her about the girl she called Fay.

The girl had been sent to a finishing school at Brussels, and Mildred had seen her no more.

His first wife had finished her education at Brussels. She had talked to him often of the fashionable boarding school, in the quaint old street near the Cathedral; and the slights she had endured there from other girls because of her isolation. There was no stint in the payment of her education. She had as many masters as she cared to have. She was as well dressed as the richest of her companions. But she was nobody, and belonged to nobody, could give no account of herself that would satisfy those merciless inquisitors.

This is what his wife had told him of her school days at Brussels; his wife, Vivien, the young English lady whom he had met at Florence. She was travelling in the care of an English painter and his wife, who had other girls in their charge. She submitted to no authority, had ample means, and was thoroughly independent. She did not get on very well with either the artist or his wife. She had a knack of saying disagreeable things, and a tongue exceeding bitter in one so young. "A difficult subject," the painter called her, and imparted to his particular friends in confidence that his wife and Miss Faux were always quarrelling. Vivien Faux, that was the name borne by the girl whom he met nineteen years ago at an evening party in Florence; that was the name of the girl he had married, after briefest acquaintance,

knowing no more about her than that she had a fortune of thirty thousand pounds when she came of age, and that the trustee and custodian of that fortune was a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn, who affected no authority over her, and put no difficulties in the way of her marrying.

He remembered how, when he first saw Mildred Fausset, something in her fresh young beauty, some indefinable peculiarity of expression or contour, had recalled the image of his dead wife, that image which never occurred to him without keenest pain. He remembered how strange that vague, indescribable resemblance had seemed to him, and how he had asked himself if it had any real existence, or were only the outcome of his own troubled mind reverting incessantly to an agonizing memory.

"Her face may come back to me in the faces of other women, as it comes back to me in my miserable dreams," he told himself.

But as the years went by he became convinced that the likeness was not imaginary. There were points of resemblance. The delicate tracing of the eyebrows, the form of the brow, the way the hair grew above the temples, were curiously alike. He came to accept the likeness as one of those chance resemblances which are common enough in life. It suggested to him nothing more than that.

He went to the library with the letter still in his hand. His lamp was ready lighted, and, the September evening being chilly, there was a wood fire on the low hearth, which gave an air of cheerfulness to the sombre room.

He rang and told the footman to send Mrs. Bell to him.

Bell appeared, erect and severe of aspect as she had been four-and-twenty years before, neatly dressed in black silk, with braided gray hair, and a white lace cap.

"Sit down, Mrs. Bell ; I have a good many questions to ask you," said Greswold, motioning her to a chair on the further side of his desk.

He was sitting with his eyes fixed, looking at the spot where Mildred had fallen senseless at his feet. He sat for some moments in a reverie, and then turned suddenly, unlocked his desk, and took out the photograph which he had shown Mildred last night.

"Did you ever see that face before, Bell ?" he asked, handing her the open case.

"Good gracious, sir, yes, indeed I should think I did ; but Miss Fay was younger than that when she came to Parchment Street."

"Did you see much of her in Parchment Street ?"

"Yes, sir, a good deal, and at the Hook too—a good deal more than I wanted to. I didn't hold with her being brought into our house, sir."

"Why not ?"

"I didn't think it was fair to my young mistress."

"But how was it unfair ?"

"Well, sir, I don't wish to say anything against the dead, and Mr. Fausset was a liberal master to me, and I make no doubt that he died a penitent man. He was a regular church-goer, and an upright man in all his ways while I lived with him; but right is right, and I shall always maintain that it was a cruel thing to a young wife like Mrs. Fausset, who doted on the ground he walked upon, to bring his natural daughter into the house."

"Mrs. Bell, do you know that this is a serious accusation you are bringing against a dead man, who cannot rise up and gainsay you?" said George Greswold solemnly. "Now, what grounds have you for saying that this girl"—with his hand upon the photograph—"was Mr. Fausset's daughter?"

"What grounds, sir? I don't want any grounds. I'm not a lawyer to put things in that way; but I know what I know. First and foremost she was the image of him; and next, why did he bring her home, and want her to be made one of the family, and treated as a sister by Miss Mildred, if she wasn't his daughter?"

"She may have been the daughter of a friend."

"People don't do that kind of thing—don't run the risk of making a wife miserable to oblige a friend," retorted Bell scornfully. "Besides, I say again, if she wasn't his own flesh and blood, why was she so like him?"

"She may have been the daughter of a near relation."

"He had but one near relation in the world, his only sister, a young lady who was so difficult to please that she refused no end of good offers, and of such a pious turn that she has devoted her life to doing good for the last five-and-twenty years, to my certain knowledge. I hope, sir, you would not insinuate that *she* had a natural daughter?"

"She may have made a secret marriage, perhaps, known only to her brother."

"She couldn't have done any such thing, sir: she was much too well looked after. She was quite a young girl, and hadn't been brought out at the time of Miss Fay's birth. Don't mix Miss Fausset up in it, pray, sir."

"Was it you only who suspected Mr. Fausset to be Miss Fay's father?"

"Only me, sir? Why it was everybody; and what was worst of all, my poor mistress knew it, and fretted over it to her dying day."

"But you never heard Mr. Fausset acknowledge the parentage?"

"No, sir, not to me; but I have no doubt he acknowledged it to his poor, dear lady. He was an affectionate husband, and he must have been very much wrapped up in that girl, or he wouldn't have made his wife unhappy about her."

With but the slightest encouragement from Mr. Greswold, Bell expatiated on the subject of Fay's residence in the two houses, and the misery she had wrought there. She unconsciously

exaggerated the general conviction about the master's relationship to his *protégée*, nor did she hint that it was she who first mooted the notion in the Parchment Street household. She left George Greswold with the belief that this relationship had been known for a fact to a great many people—that the tie between protector and protected was an open secret.

She dwelt much upon the child Mildred's love for the elder girl, which she seemed to think in itself an evidence of their sisterhood. She gave a graphic account of Mildred's illness, and described how Fay had watched beside her bed night after night.

"I saw her sitting there in her nightgown many a time when I went in the middle of the night to see if Mildred was asleep. I never liked Miss Fay, but justice is justice, and I must say—looking back upon all things," said Bell, with a virtuous air, "that there was no deception about her love for Miss Mildred. I may have thought it put on then; but looking back upon it now I know that it was real."

"I can quite understand that my wife must have been very fond of such a companion—sister or no sister—but she was so young that no doubt she soon forgot her friend. Memory is not tenacious at seven years old," said Greswold, with an air of quiet thoughtfulness, cutting the leaves of a new book which had lain on his desk, the paper knife marking the page where he had thrown it down yesterday afternoon.

"Indeed, she didn't forget, sir. You must not judge Miss Mildred by other girls of seven. She was—she was like Miss Lola, sir,"—Bell's elderly voice broke a little here. "She was all love and thoughtfulness. She doted on Miss Fay, and I never saw such grief as she felt when she came back from the seaside and found her gone. It was done for the best, and it was the only thing my mistress could do, with any regard for her own self-respect; but even I felt very sorry Miss Fay had been sent away when I saw what a blow it was to Miss Mildred. She didn't get over it for years; and though she was a good and dutiful daughter, I know that she and her mother had words about Miss Fay more than once."

"She was very fond of her, was she?" murmured George Greswold, in an absent way, steadily cutting the leaves of his book. "Very fond of her. And you have no doubt in your own mind, Mrs. Bell, that the two were sisters?"

"Not the least doubt, sir. I never had," answered Bell, resolutely.

She waited for him to speak again, but he sat silent, cutting slowly, carefully through the big volume, making not one jagged edge, so steady was the movement of the large, strong hand that grasped the paper knife. His eyes were bent upon the book, his face was in shadow.

"Is that all, sir?" Bell asked at last, when she had grown tired of his silence.

"Yes, Mrs. Bell, that will do. Good night."

When the door closed upon her, he flung the book away from him, sprang to his feet, and began to pace the room, up and down its length of forty feet, from hearthstone to door.

"Sisters—and so fond of each other," he muttered. "My God, this is fatality. In this, as in the death of my beloved child, I am helpless. The wanton neglect of my servants cost me the darling of my heart. It was not my fault—not mine—but I lost her. And now the curtain rises on another act in the tragedy, and I see myself again the victim—a wretch, blind, miserable—groping in the dark web of fate—caught in the inexorable net."

He went back to his desk by-and-by and re-read Mildred's letter in the light of the solitary lamp.

"She leaves me because our marriage is unholy in her eyes," he said to himself. "What will she think when she knows all—as she must know, I suppose, sooner or later? Sooner or later all things are known, says one of the wise ones of the earth. Sooner or later. She is on the track now. Sooner or later she must know—everything."

He flung himself into a low chair in front of the hearth, and sat with his elbows on his knees staring at the fire.

"If it were that question of legality only," he said to himself, "if it were a question of Church, law, bigotry, prejudice, I should not fear the issue. My love for her, and hers for me, would be stronger than any such prejudice. It would need but the first sharp taste of severance to bring her back to me, my fond and faithful wife, willing to submit her judgment to mine, willing to believe, as I believe, that such marriages are just and holy, such bonds pure and true all over the world, even though one country may allow and another disallow, one colony tie the knot and another loosen it. If it were *that* alone which parts us, I should not fear. But it is the past, the spectral past which rises up to thrust us asunder. Her sister! And they loved each other as David and Jonathan loved, with the love whose inheritance is a life-long regret."

CHAPTER III.

THE COUNSEL OF THE CHURCH.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Mrs. Greswold arrived at Waterloo. There had been half-an-hour's loss of time at Bishopstoke, where she changed trains, and the journey had seemed interminable to the ever-active brain of that solitary traveller. Never before had she so journeyed, never during the fourteen years of her married life had she sat behind an engine that was

carrying her away from her husband. No words could speak that agony of severance, or express the gloom of the future—stretching before her in one monotonous dead-level of desolation—which was to be spent away from him.

“If I were a Roman Catholic I would go into a convent to-morrow; I would lock myself for ever from the outer world,” she thought, feeling that the world could be nothing to her without *him*.

And then she began to ponder seriously upon those sisterhoods in which the Anglican Church is now almost as rich as the Roman. She thought of those women with whom she had been occasionally brought in contact, whom she had been able to help sometimes with her purse and with her sympathy, and she knew that when the hour came for her leaving the world there would be many homes open to receive her, many a good work worthy of her labour.

“I am not like those good women,” she thought; “the prospect seems to me so dreary. I have loved the world too well. I love it still, even after all that I have lost.”

She had telegraphed to her friend, Mrs. Tomkison, and that lady was at the terminus, with her neat little brougham, and with an enthusiastic welcome.

“It is so sweet of you to come to me,” she exclaimed; “but I hope it is not any worrying business that has brought you up to town so suddenly—papers to sign, or anything of that kind.”

Mrs. Tomkison was literary and æsthetic, and had the vaguest notions upon all business details. She was an ardent champion of woman's rights, sent Mr. Tomkison off to the City every morning to earn money for her milliners, decorators, fads, and *protégés* of every kind, and reminded him every evening of his intellectual inferiority. She had an idea that women of property were inevitably plundered by their husbands, and that it was one of the conditions of their existence to be trapped and wheedled into signing away their fortunes for the benefit of spendthrift partners, she herself being in the impregnable position of never having brought her husband a sixpence.

“No, it is hardly a business matter, Cecilia. I am only in town *en passant*. I am going to my aunt at Brighton to-morrow. I knew you would give me a night's shelter, and it is much nicer to be with you than to go to an hotel. The house in Parchment Street is still let, as you know; and if it were empty I should not go there. I have never entered it since the day of my father's funeral.”

The fact was that of two evils Mildred had chosen the lesser. She had shrunk from the idea of meeting her lively friend, and being subjected to the ordeal of that lady's curiosity; but it had seemed still more terrible to her to enter a strange hotel at night and alone. She who had never travelled alone, who had been so

closely guarded by a husband's thoughtful love, felt herself helpless as a child in that beginning of loneliness.

"I should have thought it simply detestable of you if you had gone to an hotel," protested Cecilia, who affected strong language. "We can have a delicious hour of confidential talk. I sent Adam to bed before I came out. He is an excellent, devoted creature—has just made what *he* calls a pot of money on Mexican Street Railways; but he is a dreadful bore when one wants to be alone with one's dearest friend. I have ordered the nicest little supper—a few natives, only just in, and a brace of grouse, and a bottle of the only champagne which smart people will hear of now-a-days."

"I am so sorry you troubled about supper," said Mildred, not at all curious about the last fashion in champagne. "I could not take anything—unless it were a cup of tea."

"But you must have dined early, or hurriedly at any rate. I hate that kind of dinner—everything hurried and huddled over—and the carriage announced before the *pièce de résistance*. And so you're going to your aunt. Is she ill? Has she sent for you at a moment's notice? You will come into all her money, no doubt. I am told she is immensely rich."

"I have never thought about her money."

"I suppose not, you lucky creature. It will be sending coals to Newcastle, in your case. Your father left you so rich. I am told Miss Fausset gives no end of money to her church people. She has put in two painted windows at St. Edmund's; a magnificent rose over the porch, and a window in the south transept by Burne-Jones—a delicious design: St. Cecilia sitting at an organ, with a cloud of cherubs. By-the-by, talking of St. Cecilia, how did you like my friend Castellani? He wrote me a dear little note of gratitude for my introduction, so I am sure you were very good to him."

"I could not dishonour any introduction of yours; besides, Mr. Castellani's grandfather and my father had been friends. That was a link."

"How do you like him? but here we are at home. You shall tell me more while we are at supper."

Mildred had to sit down to the oysters and grouse whether she would or no. The dining-room was charming in the day-time, with its view of the park. At night it might have been a room excavated from the ruins of Herculaneum, so strictly classic were its terra-cotta draperies, hanging all round the room on brass rods, its swinging butter-boat lamps and curule chairs.

"How sad to see you unable to eat anything," protested Mrs. Tomkison, snapping up the natives with gusto, for it may be observed that the people who wait up for travellers or for friends coming home from the play are always hungrier than those who go to return. "You shall have your cup of tea directly."

Mildred had eaten nothing since her apology for a breakfast.

She was faint with fasting, but had no appetite, and the odour of the savoury grouse, the fried bread crumbs and gravy in which her friend was revelling, sickened her. She withdrew to a chair by the fire, and had a dainty little tea-tray placed beside her, while Mrs. Tomkison did justice to one of the birds, talking all the time.

"Isn't he a gifted creature?" she asked, helping herself to the second side of the breast.

Mildred almost thought she was speaking of the grouse.

"I mean Castellani," said Cecilia, in answer to her look of wonder. "Isn't he a heap of talent? You heard him play, of course—and you heard his divine voice? When I think of his genius for music, and remember that he wrote *that* book, I am actually wonder-struck."

"The book is clever, no doubt," answered Mildred thoughtfully, "almost too clever to be quite sincere. And as for genius—well, I suppose his musical talent does almost reach genius—and yet what more can one say of Mozart, Beethoven, or Chopin? I think genius is too large a word for any one less than they."

"But I say he is a genius," cried Mrs. Tomkison, elated by grouse and dry sherry—the champagne had been put aside when Mildred refused it. "Does he not carry one out of oneself by his playing—does not his singing open the floodgates of our hard, battered old hearts? No one ever interested me so much."

"Have you known him long?"

"For the last three seasons. He is with me three or four times a week when he is in town. He is like a son of the house."

"And does Mr. Tomkison like him?"

"Oh, you know Adam," said Cecilia, with an expressive shrug. "You know Adam's way. *He* doesn't mind. 'You always must have somebody hanging about you,' he said, 'so you may as well have that French fool as any one else.' Adam calls all foreigners Frenchmen if they are not obtrusively German in their accent. Castellani has been devoted to me, and I daresay I may have got myself talked about on his account," pursued Cecilia, with the pious resignation of a blameless matron of five-and-forty, who rather likes to think herself suspected of an intrigue; "but I can't help *that*. He is one of the few young men I have ever met who understands me. And then we are such near neighbours, and it is easy for him to run in at any hour. 'You ought to give him a latch-key,' said Adam, 'it would save the servants a lot of trouble.'"

"Yes, I remember; he lives in Queen Anne's Mansions," Mildred answered listlessly.

"He has a suite of rooms near the top, looking over half London, *and* so prettily furnished. He gives afternoon tea to a few chosen friends who don't mind the lift; and we have had a materialization in his rooms, but it wasn't a particularly good

one," added Mrs. Tomkison, as if she were talking of something to eat.

The maid Louisa arrived at Queen Anne's Gate a little before luncheon on the following day. She brought a considerable portion of Mrs. Greswold's belongings in two large basket trunks, a portmanteau and a dressing-bag. These were at once sent on to Victoria in the cab that had brought the young person and the luggage from Waterloo, while the young person herself was accommodated with dinner, table beer and gossip in the servants' hall. She also brought a letter for her mistress, a letter written by George Greswold late on the night before.

Mildred could hardly tear open the envelope for the trembling of her hands. How would he write to her? Would he plead against her decision, would he try to make her waver—would he set love against law in such eloquent and irresistible words as love alone can use? She knew her own weakness and his strength, and she opened his letter full of fear for her own resolution.

There was no passionate pleading. The letter was measured almost to coldness.

"I need not say that your departure, together with your explanation of that departure, has come upon me as a crushing blow. Your reasons in your own mind are doubtless unanswerable; I cannot even endeavour to gainsay them. I could only seem to you as a special pleader, making the worse appear the better cause, for my own selfish ends. You know my opinion upon this hard-fought question of marriage with a deceased wife's sister; and you know how widely it differs from Mr. Cancellor's view and yours—which, to my mind, is the view of the bigot and not the Christian. There is no word in Christ's teaching to forbid such marriages. Your friend and master, Clement Cancellor, is of the school which sets the wisdom of a mediæval Church above the wisdom of Christ. Am I to lose my wife because Mr. Cancellor is a better Christian than his divine Master?

"But granted that you are fixed in this way of thinking, that you deem it your duty to break your husband's heart and make his home desolate rather than tolerate the idea of union with one who was once married to your half-sister, let me ask you at least to consider whether you have sufficient ground for believing that my first wife was verily your father's daughter. In the first place your only evidence of the identity between my wife and the girl you call Fay consists of a photograph which bears a striking likeness to the girl you knew, a likeness which I am bound to say Bell saw as instantly as you yourself had seen it. Remember that the strongest resemblances have been found between those who were of no kin to each other, and remember that more than one judicial murder has been committed on the strength of just such a likeness.

"The main point at issue, however, is not so much the question of identity as the question whether the girl Fay was actually your father's daughter, and from my cross-examination of Bell it appears to me that the evidence against your father in this matter is one of impressions only, and even, as circumstantial evidence, too feeble to establish any case against the accused. Is it impossible for a man to be interested in an orphan girl, and to be anxious to establish her in his own home, as a companion for his only child, unless that so-called orphan were his own daughter, the offspring of a hidden intrigue? There may be stronger evidence as to Fay's parentage than the suspicions of servants, or your mother's jealousy; but as yet I have arrived at none. You possibly may know much more than Bell knows, more than your letter implies. If it is not so, if you are acting on casual suspicions only, I can but say that you are prompt to strike a man whose heart has been sorely tried of late, and who had a special claim upon your tenderness by reason of that recent loss.

"I can write no more, Mildred. My heart is too heavy for many words. I do not reproach you. I only ask you to consider what you are doing, before you make our parting irrevocable. You have entreated me not to follow you, and I will obey you so far as to give you ample time for reflection before I force myself upon your presence; but I must see you before you leave England. I ask no answer to this letter until we meet.

"Your loving and unhappy husband,

"GEORGE GRESWOLD."

The letter chilled her by its calm logic—its absence of passion. There seemed very little of the lover left in a husband who could so write. His contempt for a law which to her was sacred shocked her almost as an open declaration of unbelief. His sneer at Clement Cancellor wounded her to the quick.

She answered her husband's letter immediately.

"Alas, my beloved," she wrote, "my reason for believing Fay to have been my sister is unanswerable. My mother on her death-bed told me of the relationship—told me her sad secret with bitter tears. The knowledge of that story in the past had cast a shadow on the latter years of her married life. I had seen her unhappy without knowing the cause. On her death-bed she confided in me. I was almost a woman then, and old enough to understand what she told me. Women are so jealous where they love, George. I suffered many a sharp pang after my discovery of your previous marriage. I was jealous of that unknown rival who had gone before me, little dreaming that fatal marriage was to cancel my own.

"My mother's witness is indisputable. She must have known. And as I grew older I saw that there was something in my father's manner when Fay was mentioned that indicated some

painful secret. The time came when I was careful to avoid the slightest allusion to my lost sister, but in my own mind and in my own heart I guarded her image as the image of a sister.

"I am grieved that you should despise Mr. Cancellor and his opinions. My religious education was derived entirely from him. My father and mother were both careless, though neither was unbelieving. He taught me to care for spiritual things. He taught me to look to a better life than the best we can lead here; and in this dark hour I thank and bless him for having so taught me. What should I be now adrift on a sea of trouble without the compass of faith and duty? I will steer by that, George, even though it carry me away from him I shall always devotedly love.—Ever in severance as in union,

"Your loving,
"MILDRED."

She had written to Mr. Cancellor early that morning, asking him to call upon her before four o'clock. He was announced a few minutes after she finished her letter, and she went to the drawing-room to receive him.

His rusty black coat, and shabby felt hat crumpled carelessly in his bare and bony hand, looked curiously out of harmony with Mrs. Tomkison's drawing-room, which was the passion of her life, the heathen temple to which she carried gold and frankincense and myrrh, in the shape of *rose du Barri* and *bleu du roi* Sèvres, veritable old Sherraton tables and chairs, and gems in the shape of commodes and cabinets from the boudoir of Marie Antoinette, a lady who must assuredly have sat at more tables and written at more *escritaires* than any other woman in the world. Give her Majesty only five minutes for every table, and ten for every *bonheur du jour* attributed to her possession, and her life would have been longer than the span which she was granted of joy and grief between the passing of the marriage ring and the fall of the axe.

Unightly as that dark figure showed amidst the delicate tertiaries of Lyons brocades and the bright colouring of satinwood tables and Sèvres porcelain, Mr. Cancellor was perfectly at his ease in Mrs. Tomkison's drawing-room. He wasted very few of his hours in such rooms, albeit there were many such in which his presence was courted, but, seldom as he appeared amidst such surroundings, he was never disconcerted by them. He was not easily impressed by externals. The filth and squalor of a London slum troubled him no more than the artistic intricacies of a West End drawing-room in which the *culte* of the Beautiful left him no room to put down his hat. It was humanity for which he cared—persons, not things. His soul went straight to the souls he was anxious to save. He was narrow perhaps; but in that narrowness there was a concentrative power that could work wonders.

One glance at Mildred's face showed him that she was distressed, and that her trouble was no small thing. He held her hand in his long lean fingers, and looked at her earnestly as he said :

"You have something to tell me—some sorrow."

"Yes," she answered, "an incurable sorrow."

She burst into tears, the first she had shed since she left her home, and sobbed passionately for some moments, leaning against a Trianon spinet, raining her tears upon the *vernis Martin* in a way that would have made Mrs. Tomkison's blood run cold.

"How weak I am," she said impatiently, as she dried her eyes and choked back her sobs. "I thought I was accustomed to my sorrow by this time. God knows it is no new thing. It seems a century old already."

"Sit down, and tell me all about it," said Clement Cancellor quietly, drawing forward a chair for her, and then seating himself by her side. "I cannot help you till you have told me all your trouble, and you know I shall help you if I can. I shall sympathize with you in any case."

"Yes, I am sure of that," she answered sadly; and then falteringly but clearly she told him the whole story, from the beginning in the days of her childhood, till the end yesterday. She held back nothing, she spared no one. Freely as to her father confessor she told all.

"I have left him for ever," she concluded. "Have I done right?"

"Yes, you have done right. Anything less than that would have been less than right. If you are sure of your facts as to the relationship—if Mr. Greswold's first wife was your father's daughter—there was no other course open to you. There was no alternative."

"And my marriage is invalid in law?" questioned Mildred.

"I do not think so. The law is full of iniquities. If this young lady was your father's natural daughter she had no status in the eye of the law. She was not your sister—she belonged to no one, in the eye of the law. She had no right to bear your father's name. So, if you accept the civil law for your guide, you may still be George Greswold's wife—you may ignore the tie between you and his first wife. Legally it has no existence."

Mildred crimsoned, and then grew deadly pale. In the eye of the law her marriage was valid. She was not a dishonoured woman—a wife and no wife. She might still stand by her husband's side—go down to the grave as his companion and sweetheart. They who so short a time ago were wedded lovers might be lovers again, all clouds dispersed, the sunshine of domestic peace upon their pathway—if she were content to be guided by the law.

"Should you think me justified if I were to accept my legal

position, and shut my eyes to all the rest?" she asked, knowing but too well what the answer would be.

"Should *I* so think! Oh, Mildred, do you know me so little that you have any need to ask such a question? When have I ever taken the law for my guide? Have I not defied that law when it stood between me and my faith? Am I not ready to defy it again were the choice between conscience and law forced upon me? To my mind your half-sister's position makes not one jot of difference. She was not the less your sister because of her parent's sin, and your marriage with the man who was her husband is not the less an incestuous marriage."

The word struck Mildred like a whip—stung the wounded heart like the sharp cut of a lash.

"Not one word more," she cried, holding up her hands as if to ward off a blow. "If my union with my—very dear—husband was a sinful union, I was an unconscious sinner. The bond is broken for ever—I shall sin no more."

Her tears came again; but this time they gathered slowly on the weary lids, and rolled slowly down the pale cheeks, while she sat with her eyes fixed, looking straight before her in dumb despair.

"Be sure all will be well with you if you cleave to the right," said the priest, with grave tenderness, feeling for her as acutely as an ascetic can feel for the grief that springs from earthly passions and temporal loves, sympathizing as a mother sympathizes with a child that sobs over a broken toy. The toy is a worthless, futile thing, but to the child priceless.

"What are you going to do with your life?" he asked gently, after a long pause, in which he had given her time to recover calmness and self-possession.

"I hardly know. I shall go to Germany next month, I think, and choose some out-of-the-way nook, where I can live quietly, and then for the winter I may go to Italy or the south of France. A year hence, perhaps, I may enter a sisterhood; but I do not want to take such a step hurriedly."

"No, not hurriedly," said Mr. Cancellor, his face lighting up suddenly as that pale, thin, irregular-featured face could light itself with the divine radiance from within; "not hurriedly, not too soon; but I feel assured that it would be a good thing for you to do—the sovereign cure for a broken life. You think now that happiness would be impossible for you, anywhere, anyhow. Believe me, my dear Mildred, you would find it in doing good to others. A vulgar remedy, an old woman's recipe, perhaps, but infallible. A life lived for the good of others is always a happy life. You know the glory of the sky at sunset—there is nothing like it, no such splendour, no such beauty—and yet it is only a reflected light. So it is with the human heart, Mildred. The sun of individual love—the fierce orb of selfish passion—has sunk below

life's horizon, but the reflected glory of the Christian's love for sinners brightens that horizon with a far lovelier light."

"If I could feel like you—if I were as unselfish as you——" faltered Mildred.

"You have seen Louise Hillersdon? a frivolous, pleasure-loving woman, you think, perhaps? one who was once an abject sinner, whom you are tempted to despise. I have seen that woman kneeling by the bed of death—I have seen her ministering with unblenching courage to the sufferers from the most loathsome diseases humanity knows, and I firmly believe that those hours of unselfish love have been the brightest spots in her chequered life. Believe me, Mildred, self-sacrifice is the shortest road to happiness. No, I would not urge you to make your election hurriedly. Give yourself leisure for thought and prayer; and then, if you decide on devoting your life to good works, command my help, my counsel—all that is mine to give."

"I know—I know that I have a sure friend in you, and that under heaven I have no better friend," she answered quietly, glancing at the clock as she spoke. "I am going to Brighton this afternoon, to spend a few days with my aunt, and to—tell her what has happened. She must know all about Fay. If there is any room for doubt she will tell me. My last hope is there."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RICH MISS FAUSSET.

MISS FAUSSET—Madelina Fausset—occupied a large house in Lewes Crescent, with windows commanding all that there is of bold coast line and open sea to be beheld at Brighton. Her windows looked eastward, and her large substantial mansion seemed as it were to turn its back upon all the frivolities of the popular watering-place—upon its Cockney visitors of summer and its November smartness, its aquarium and theatre, its London stars and Pavilion concerts, its carriages and horsemen—few of whom ever went so far east as Lewes Crescent; its brazen bands and brazen faces—upon everything except its church bells, which were borne up to Miss Fausset's windows by every west wind, and which sounded with but little intermission from no less than three temples within a quarter of a mile of the Crescent.

Happily Miss Fausset loved the sound of church bells, loved all things connected with her own particular church with the ardour which a woman who has few ties of kindred or friendship can afford to give to clerical matters. Nothing except serious indisposition would have prevented her attending matins at St. Edmund's, the picturesque and semi-fashionable Gothic temple in a narrow side-street within ten minutes' walk of the Crescent; nor

was she often absent from afternoon prayers, which were read daily at five o'clock to a small and select congregation. The somewhat stately figure of the elderly spinster was familiar to most of the congregation at St. Edmund's. All old Brightonians knew the history of that tall, slim maiden lady, richly clad after a style of her own, which succeeded in reconciling Puritanism with Parisian fashion, very dignified in her carriage and manners, with a touch of hauteur, as of a miserable sinner who knew that she belonged to the salt of the earth. They knew that she was Miss Fausset, sole survivor of the great house of Fausset and Company, silk merchants and manufacturers, St. Paul's Churchyard and Lyons; that she had inherited a handsome fortune from her father before she was thirty; that she had refused a good many advantageous offers, had ranked as a beauty, and had been much admired in her time; that she had occupied the house in Lewes Crescent for more than a quarter of a century, and that she had taken a prominent part in philanthropic undertakings and clerical matters during the greater number of those years. No charity bazaar was considered in the way of success until Miss Fausset had promised to hold a stall; no new light in the ecclesiastical firmament of Brighton could be considered a veritable star until Miss Fausset had taken notice of him. She mixed in the very best Brighton society, but not much. She received everybody connected with Church and charitable matters. Afternoon tea in her drawing-room was considered a privilege, and strangers were taken to her as to a royal personage. Her occasional dinners—very rare, and never large—were talked of as perfection in the way of dining.

"It is easy for her to do things nicely," sighed an overweighted matron, "with her means, and no family. She must be inordinately rich."

"Did she come into a very large fortune at her father's death?"

"Oh, I believe old Fausset was almost a millionaire, and he had only a son and a daughter. But it is not so much the amount she inherited as the amount she must have saved. Think how she must have nursed her income, with her quiet way of living. Only four indoor servants and a coachman, no garden, and one brougham horse. She must be rolling in money."

"She gives away a great deal."

"Nothing compared with what other people spend. Money goes a long way in charity. Ten pounds makes a good show on a subscription list; but what is it in a butcher's book? I daresay my three boys have spent as much at Oxford in the last six years as Miss Fausset has given in charity within the same time."

It pleased Miss Fausset to live quietly, and to spend very little money upon show or splendour of any kind. There was distinction enough for her in the intellectual ascendancy she had

acquired among those church-going Brightonians who thought exactly as she thought. Her spacious, well-appointed house; her experienced servants—cook, housemaid, lady's-maid, and butler; her neat miniature brougham, and perfect brougham horse, realized all her desires in the way of comfort or luxury. Her own diet was of an almost ascetic simplicity, and her servants were on board wages; but she gave her visitors the best that the season or the fashion could suggest to a skilful cook. Even her afternoon's tea was considered superior to everybody else's tea, and her table was provided with daintier cakes and biscuits than were to be seen elsewhere.

Her house had been decorated and furnished under her own directions, and was marked in all particulars by that grain of Puritanism which was noticeable in the lady's attire. The carpets and curtains in the two drawing-rooms were of delicate tones of silver grey. The furniture was French, and belonged to the period of the Directory, when the graceful lightness of the Louis Seize style was merging into the classicalism of the Empire. In Miss Fausset's drawing-room there were none of those charming futilities which cumber the tables of more frivolous women. Here Mr. Cancellor would have found ample room for his hat—room for a committee meeting, or a mission service indeed—on that ample expanse of silvery velvet pile, a small arabasque pattern in different shades of grey.

The grand piano was the principal feature of the larger room, but it was not draped or disguised, sophisticated by flower vases, or made glorious with plush, after the manner of fashionable pianos. It stood forth—a concert grand, in unsophisticated bulk of richly-carved rosewood—a Broadwood piano, and nothing more. The inner room was lined with book-shelves, and had the air of a room that was meant for usefulness rather than hospitality. A large, old-fashioned rosewood *secrétaire*—of the Directory period—occupied the space in front of the wide single window, which commanded a view of dead walls covered with Virginia creeper, and in the distance a glimpse of the crocketed spire of St. Edmund's, a reproduction in little of one of the turrets of the Sainte Chapelle.

Two-thirds of the volumes in those tall bookcases were of a theological or pious character, the remaining third consisted of those standard books which everybody ought to read, but which only the superior few do read.

Mildred had telegraphed in the morning to announce her visit, and she found her aunt's confidential man-servant, a German Swiss, and her aunt's neat little brougham waiting for her at the station. Miss Fausset herself was in the inner drawing-room ready to receive her niece.

There was something in the chastened colouring and perfect order of that house in Lewes Crescent which always chilled

Mildred upon entering it after a long interval. It was more than three years since she had visited her aunt, and this afternoon in the fading light the silver-grey drawing-rooms looked colder and emptier than usual.

Madelina Fausset came forward to receive her niece, and imprinted a stately kiss of welcome on each cheek.

"My dear Mildred, this has been a most agreeable surprise," she said; "but I hope it is no family trouble that has brought you to me—so suddenly."

She looked at her niece searchingly with her cold, grey eyes. She was a handsome woman still, at fifty-seven years of age. Her features were faultlessly regular, and the oval of her face was nearly as perfect as it had been at seven-and-twenty. Her abundant hair was silvery grey, and worn *à la* Marie Antoinette, a style which lent dignity to her appearance. Her dinner gown of dark grey silk fitted her tall, upright figure to perfection, and her one ornament, an antique diamond cross, half hidden by the folds of her cambric fichu, was worthy of the rich Miss Fausset.

"Yes, aunt, it is trouble that has brought me to you—very bitter trouble; but it is just possible that you can help me to overcome it. I have come to you for help, if you can give it."

"My dear child, you must know I would do anything in my power——" Miss Fausset began, with gentle deliberation.

"Yes, yes, I know," Mildred answered, almost impatiently. "I know that you will be sorry for me—but you may not be able to do anything. It is a forlorn hope. In such a strait as mine one catches at any hope."

Her aunt's measured accents jarred upon her over-strung nerves. Her grief raged within her like a fever, and the grave placidity of the elder woman tortured her. There seemed no capacity for sympathy in this stately spinster who stood and scanned her with coldly inquisitive eyes.

"Can we be quite alone for a little while, aunt? Are you sure of no one interrupting us while I am telling you my troubles?"

"I will give an order." It is only half-past six, and we do not dine till eight. There is no reason we should be disturbed. Come and sit over here, Mildred, on this sofa. Your maid can take your hat and jacket to your room."

Stray garments lying about in those orderly drawing-rooms would have been agony to Miss Fausset. She rang the bell, and told the servant to send Mrs. Greswold's maid, and to take particular care that no one was admitted.

"I can see nobody this evening," she said. "If any one calls you will say I have my niece with me, and cannot be disturbed."

Franz, the Swiss butler, bowed with an air of understanding the finest shades of feeling in that honoured mistress. He brought out a tea-table, and placed it conveniently near the sofa on which Mildred was sitting, and he placed upon it the neatest of salvers

with tiny silver teapot and ivory Worcester cup and saucer, and bread and butter such as Titania herself might have eaten with an apricock or a cluster of dewberries. Then he discreetly retired, and sent Louisa, who smelt of tea and toast already, though she could not have been more than ten minutes in the great stony basement, which would have accommodated a company of infantry just as easily as the spinster's small establishment.

Louisa took the jacket and hat and her mistress' keys, and withdrew to finish her tea and to freely discuss the motive and meaning of this extraordinary journey from Enderby to Brighton. The general opinion over the housekeeper's tea-table inclined to the idea that Mrs. Greswold had found a letter—a fatal and compromising letter—addressed to her husband by some lady with whom he had been carrying on an intrigue, in all probability Mrs. Hillersdon, of Riverdale.

“We all know who *she* was before Mr. Hillersdon married her,” said Louisa, “and don't tell me that a woman who has behaved like that while she was young would ever be really prudent. Mrs. Hillersdon must be fifty if she's a day, but she is a handsome woman still, and, who knows? she may have been an old flame of my master's.”

“That's it,” sighed Franz assentingly. “It's generally an old flame that does the mischief. *Wir sind armer Schlucker.*”

“And now, my dear, tell me what has gone wrong with you,” said Miss Fausset, seating herself on the capacious sofa—low, broad, luxurious, one of Crunden's masterpieces—beside her niece.

The heavily-draped windows shut out the cold light in the eastern sky, and the rooms were growing shadowy. A small fire burned in the bright steel grate, and made the one cheerful spot in the room, touching the rich bindings of the books with wandering gleams of light.

“Oh, it is a long story, aunt. I must begin at the beginning. I have a question to ask you—a question that means life or death to me.”

“A question—to—ask—me?”

Miss Fausset uttered the words slowly, spacing them out, one by one, in her clear, calm voice—the voice that had spoken at committee meetings, and had laid down the law in matters charitable and ecclesiastical many times in that good town of Brighton.

“I must go back to my childhood, aunt, in the first place,” began Mildred, in her low, earnest voice, her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon her aunt's coldly correct profile, between her and the light of the fire, the wide window behind her, with the day gradually darkening after the autumnal sunset. The three eastward-looking windows in the large room beyond had a ghostly look, with their long guipure curtains closely drawn against the dying light.

"I must go back to the time when I was seven years old, and my dear father," falteringly and with tears in her voice, "brought home his adopted daughter, Fay—Fay Fausset, he called her. She was fourteen and I was only seven—but I was very fond of her all the same. We took to each other from the very beginning. When we left London and went to the Hook, Fay went with us. I was ill there, and she helped to nurse me. She was very good to me—kinder than I can say—and I loved her as if she had been my sister. But when I got well she was sent away—sent to a finishing school at Brussels, and I never saw her again. She had only lived with us one short summer. Yet it seemed as if she and I had been together all my life. I missed her so sorely. I missed her for years afterwards."

"My tender-hearted Mildred," said Miss Fausset, gently. "It was like you to give your love to a stranger, and to be so faithful to her memory."

"Oh, but she was not a stranger; she was something nearer and dearer. I could hardly have been so fond of her if there had not been some link between us."

"Nonsense, Mildred. A warm-hearted child will take to any one near her own age who is kind to her. Why should this girl have been anything more than an orphan, whom your father adopted out of the generosity of his heart?"

"Oh, she was something more. There was a mystery. Did you ever see her, aunt? I don't remember your coming to Parchment Street or to the Hook while she was with us."

"No. I was away from England that year. I spent that summer and autumn on the Lake of Geneva with my friends the Templemores."

"Ah, then you knew nothing of the trouble Fay made in our home—most innocently. It is such a sad story, aunt. I can hardly bear to touch upon it, even to you, for it casts a shadow upon my father's character. You know how I loved and honoured him, and how it must pain me to say one word that reflects upon him!"

"Yes, I know you loved him. You could not love him too well, Mildred. He was a good man—a noble-hearted, noble-minded man."

"And yet that one act of his, bringing poor Fay into his home, brought unhappiness upon us all. My mother seemed set against her from the very first, and on her death-bed she told me that Fay was my father's daughter. She gave me no proof—she told me nothing beyond that one cruel fact. Fay was the offspring of hidden sin. She told me this, and told me to remember it all my life. Do you think, aunt, she was justified in this accusation against my father?"

"How can I tell, Mildred," Miss Fausset answered coldly. "My brother may have had secrets from me."

"But did you never hear anything—any hint of this mystery?"

Did you never know anything about your brother's life in the years before his marriage which would serve as a clue? He could hardly have cared for any one—been associated with any one—and you not hear something——”

“If you mean did I ever hear that my brother had a mistress, I can answer no,” replied Miss Fausset, in a very unsympathetic voice. “But men do not usually allow such things to be known to their sisters—especially to a younger sister, as I was by a good many years. He may have been—like other men. Few seem free from the stain of sin. But however that may have been I know nothing about the matter.”

“And you do not know the secret of Fay's parentage—you my father's only sister—his only surviving relation. Can you help me to find any one who knew more about his youth—any confidential friend—any one who can tell me whether that girl was really my sister?”

“No, Mildred. I have no knowledge of your father's friends. They are all dead and gone perhaps. But what can it matter to you who this girl was? She is dead. Let the secret of her existence die with her. It is wisest, most charitable to do so.”

“Ah, you know she is dead,” cried Mildred quickly. “Where and when did she die? How did you hear of her?”

“From your father. She died abroad. I do not remember the year.”

“Was it before my marriage?”

“Yes, I believe so.

“Long before?”

“Two or three years perhaps. I cannot tell you anything precisely. The matter was of no moment to me.”

“Oh, aunt, it is life and death to *me*. She was my husband's first wife. She and I—daughters of one father—as I, alas! can but believe we were—married the same man.”

“I never heard your husband was a widower.”

“No, nor did I know it until a few weeks ago;” and then, as clearly as her distress of mind would allow, Mildred told how the discovery had been made.

“The evidence of a picture—a photograph which may be a good or a bad likeness—is a small thing to go upon, Mildred,” said her aunt. “I think you have been very foolish to make up your mind upon such evidence.”

“Oh, but there are other facts—coincidences. And nothing would make me doubt the identity of the original of that photograph with Fay Fausset. I recognized it at the first glance; and Bell, who saw it afterwards, knew the face immediately. There could be no error in that. The only question is about her parentage. I thought, if there were room for doubt in the face of my mother's death-bed statement, you could help me. But it is all over. You were my last hope,” said Mildred despairingly.

She let her face sink forward upon her clasped hands. Only in this moment did she know how she had clung to the hope that her aunt would be able to assure her she was mistaken in her theory of Fay's parentage.

"My dear Mildred," began Miss Fausset, after a pause, "the words you have just used—'death-bed statement'—seem to mean something very solemn—indisputable—irrevocable; but I must beg you to remember that your poor mother was a very weak woman, and a very exacting wife. She was offended with my brother for his adoption of an orphan girl. I have heard her hold forth about her wrongs many a time—vaguely—not daring to accuse him before me; but still I could understand the drift of her thoughts. She may have nursed these vague suspicions of hers until they seemed to her like positive facts, and on her death-bed, her brain enfeebled by illness, she may have made direct assertions upon no other ground than those long-cherished suspicions and the silent jealousies of years. I do not think, Mildred, you ought to take any decisive step upon the evidence of your mother's jealousy."

"My mother spoke with conviction. She must have known something—she must have had some proof. But, even if it were possible she could have spoken so positively without any other ground than jealous feeling, there are other facts that cry aloud to me, evidences to which I have not shut my eyes. Fay must have belonged to some one, aunt," pursued Mildred, with growing earnestness, clasping her hands upon Miss Fausset's arm as they sat side by side in the gathering darkness. "There must have been some reason—and a strong one—for her presence in our house. My father was not a man to act upon caprice. I never remember any foolish or frivolous act of his in all the years of my girlhood. He was a man of thought and strong purpose; he did nothing without a motive. He would not have charged himself with the care of that poor girl unless he had considered it his duty to protect her."

"Perhaps not."

"I am sure not. Then comes the question, who was she if she was not my father's daughter? He had no near relations—he had no bosom friend that I ever heard of—no friend so dear that he would deem it his duty to adopt that friend's orphan child. There is no other clue to the mystery that I can imagine. Can you, aunt, suggest any other solution?"

"No, Mildred, I am as ignorant as you."

"If there were no other evidence within my knowledge, my father's manner alone would have given me a clue to his secret. He so studiously evaded my inquiries about Fay—there was such a settled melancholy in his manner when he spoke of her."

"Poor John—he had a heart of gold, Mildred. There never was a truer man than your father. Be sure of that, come what may."

"I have never doubted that."

There was a pause of some minutes after this. The two women sat in silence looking at the fire, which had burned red and hollow since Franz had last attended to it. Mildred sat with her head leaning against her aunt's shoulder, her hand clasping her aunt's hand. Miss Fausset sat erect as a dart, looking steadily at the fire, her lips compressed and resolute, the image of unfaltering purpose.

"And now, Mildred," she began at last, in those firm and measured accents which Mildred remembered in her childhood as an association of awe, "take an old woman's advice, and profit by an old woman's experience of life if you can. Put this suspicion of yours on one side—forget it as if it had never been—and go back to your good and faithful husband. This suspicion of yours is but a suspicion at most, founded on the jealous fancy of one of the most fanciful women I ever knew. Why should George Greswold's life be made desolate because your mother was a bundle of nerves? Forget—forget all you have ever thought about that orphan girl—and go back to your duty as a wife."

Mildred started away from her aunt, and left the sofa as if she had suddenly discovered herself in contact with the Evil One.

"Aunt, you astound, you horrify me," she exclaimed. "Can *you* be so false to the conduct and principles of your whole life—can *you* put duty to a husband before duty to God? Have I not sworn to honour Him with all my heart, with all my strength; and if in this trial of my faith the sacrifice is almost more than my strength can bear, am I to yield to the weak counsel of my heart which would put my love of the creature above my honour of the Creator? Would you counsel me to persist in an unholy union—you whose life has been given up to the service of God—you who have put His service far above all earthly affections? You who have shown yourself so strong—can you counsel me to be so weak and to let my love—my fond true love for my dear one—conquer my knowledge of the right? Who knows if my darling's death may not have been God's judgment upon iniquity—God's judgment——"

She had burst into sudden tears at the mention of her husband's name, with all that tenderness his image evolved; but at that word judgment she stopped abruptly with a half-hysterical cry, as a memory flashed back upon her mind.

She remembered the afternoon of the return to Enderby, and how her husband had knelt by his daughter's grave, believing himself alone, and how there had come up from that prostrate figure a bitter cry:

"Judgment! Judgment!"

Did he know? Was that the remorseful ejaculation of one who knew himself a deliberate sinner?

Miss Fausset endured this storm of reproof without a word.

She never altered her attitude, or wavered in her quiet contemplation of the fading fire. She waited while Mildred paced up and down the room in a tempest of passionate feeling; and then she said, even more quietly than she had spoken before:

"My dear Mildred, I have given you my advice—conscientiously. If you refuse to be guided by the wisdom of one who is more than twenty years your senior, the consequences of your obstinacy must be upon your own head. I only know that if I had as good a man as George Greswold for my husband"—with a little catch in her voice that sounded almost like a sob—"it would take a great deal more than a suspicion to part me from him. And now, Mildred, if you mean to dress for dinner, it is time you went to your room."

In any other house, and with any other hostess, Mildred would have asked to be let off the burden of a formal dinner, and to spend the rest of the evening in her own room; but she knew her aunt's dislike of any domestic irregularity, so she went away meekly and put on her black lace dinner-gown, and returned to the drawing-room at five minutes before eight.

She had been absent half-an-hour, but it seemed to her as if Miss Fausset had not stirred since she left her. The lamps were lighted, the fire had been made up, and the curtains were drawn, but the mistress of the house was sitting in exactly the same attitude on the sofa near the fire, erect, motionless, with her thoughtful gaze fixed upon the burning coals in the low steel grate.

Aunt and niece dined *tête-à-tête*, ministered to by the experienced Franz, who was thorough master of his calling. All the details of that quiet dinner were of an elegant simplicity, but everything was perfect after its fashion, from the soup to the dessert, from the Irish damask to the old English silver—everything such as befitted the station of a lady who was often spoken of as the rich Miss Fausset.

The evening passed in mournful quiet. Mildred played two of Mozart's sonatas at her aunt's request, sonatas which she had played in her girlhood before the advent of her first and only lover, that lover who was now left widowed and desolate, in that time which should have been the golden afternoon of life. As her fingers played those familiar movements, her mind was at Enderby with the husband she had deserted. How was he bearing his solitude, she wondered? Would he shut his heart against her in anger, teach himself to live his life without her? She pictured him in his accustomed corner of the drawing-room, with his lamp-lit table, and pile of books and papers, and Pamela seated on the other side of the room, and the dogs lying on the hearth, and the room all aglow with flowers in the subdued light of the shaded lamps; so different from these cold and colourless rooms of Miss Fausset's, with their look as of vaulted halls, in which voices echo with hollow reverberations in empty space.

And then she thought of her own desolate life, and wondered what it was to be. She felt as if she had no strength of mind to chalk out a path for herself—to create for herself a mission. That sublime idea of living for others, of a life devoted to finding the lost ones of Israel—or nursing the sick—or teaching little children the way of righteousness—left her cold. Her thoughts dwelt persistently upon her own loves, her own losses, her own ideal of happiness.

“I am of the earth, earthy,” she told herself despairingly, as her fingers lingered over the adagio. “If I were like Clement Cancellor, my grief would be easier to bear—my own individual sorrow would seem as nothing compared with that vast sum of human suffering which he is always trying to lessen.”

“May I ask what your plans are for the future, Mildred?” said Miss Fausset, laying aside a memoir of Bishop Selwyn which she had been reading while her niece played. “I need hardly tell you that I shall be pleased to have you here as long as you care to stay; but I should like to know your scheme of life—in the event of your persistence in a separation from your husband.”

“I have made no definite plan, aunt; I shall spend the autumn in some quiet place on the Rhine, and perhaps go on to Italy for the winter.”

“Why to Italy?”

“It is the dream of my life to see that country, and my husband always refused to take me there.”

“For some good reason, no doubt.”

“I believe he had a nervous dread of fever. I know of no other reason.”

“You are prompt to take advantage of your independence.”

“Indeed, aunt, I have no idea of that kind. God help me, my independence is a sorry privilege. But if any country could offer distraction of mind to me, that country would be Italy.”

“And after the winter? Do you mean to live abroad altogether?”

“I don’t know what I may do. I have thoughts of entering a sisterhood by-and-by.”

“Well, you must follow your own course, Mildred. I can say no more than I have said already. If you make up your mind to leave the world there are sisterhoods all over England, and there is plenty of good work to be done. Perhaps after all it is the best life, and that those are happiest who shut their minds against earthly affections.”

“As you have done, aunt,” said Mildred, with respect. “I know how full of good works your life has been.”

“I have tried to do my duty according to my lights,” answered the spinster gravely.

The next day was cold and stormy, autumn with the foretaste of winter. Mildred went to the morning service with her aunt,

in the bright new Gothic church which Miss Fausset's liberality had helped to create; a picturesque temple with clustered columns and richly floriated capitals, diapered roof, and shining pavement, and over all things the glow of many-coloured lights from painted windows. Miss Fausset spent the morning in visiting among the poor. She had a large district out in the London road, in a part of Brighton of which the fashionable Brightonian hardly knoweth the existence.

Mildred sat in the back drawing-room all the morning, pretending to read. She took volume after volume out of the bookcase, turned over the leaves, or sat staring at a page for a quarter of an hour at a time, in hopeless vacuity of mind. She had brooded upon her trouble until her intellect seemed benumbed, and nothing was left of that sharp sorrow but a dull aching pain.

After luncheon she went out for a solitary walk on the cliff road towards Rottingdean. It was a relief to find herself alone upon that barren down, with the great stormy sea in front of her, and all the busy world left behind. She walked all the way to Rottingdean, rejoicing in her solitude, dreading the return to the stately French gray drawing-room and her aunt's society. Looking down at the shabby little village nestling in the hollow of the hills it seemed to her that she might hide her sorrows almost as well in that quiet nook as in Rhineland; and it seemed to her, also, that this place of all others was best fitted for the establishment of any charitable foundation in a small way, for a home for the aged poor, for instance, or for a cradle for orphan children. Her own fortune would amply suffice for any such modest foundation. The means were at her disposal. Only the will was wanting.

It was growing dusk when she went back to Lewes Crescent, so she went straight to her room and dressed for dinner before going to the drawing-room. The wind, with its odour of the sea, had refreshed her. She felt less depressed, better able to face a life-long sorrow than before she went out, but physically she was exhausted by the six-mile walk, and she looked pale as ashes in her black lace gown, with its evening bodice, showing the alabaster throat and a large black enamel locket set with a monogram in diamonds—L. G., *Laura Greswold*.

She entered by the door of the inner room. Her aunt was not there, and there was only one large reading lamp burning on a table near the fire. The front drawing-room was all in shadow. She went towards the piano intending to play to herself in the twilight, but as she moved slowly in the direction of the instrument, which stood between the tall guipure-shaded windows, and in deep shadow, a strong hand played a modulation of Sebastian Bach's—a chain of slow and solemn chords that faded in a *pianissimo rallentando*.

The hands that played those chords were the hands of a

master. It was hardly a surprise to Mildred when a tall figure rose from the piano, and César Castellani stood before her in the dim light.

His hat and gloves were upon the piano, as if he had just entered the room.

"My dear Mrs. Greswold, what a delightful surprise to find you here! I had made a late call upon your aunt—she is always indulgent to my Bohemian indifference to etiquette—and had not the least idea that I should see you."

"I did not know that you and my aunt were friends."

"No?" interrogatively. "That is very odd, for we are quite old friends. Miss Fausset was all goodness to me when I was an idle undergraduate at Magdalen."

"Yet when you came to Enderby you brought an introduction from Mrs. Tomkison. Surely my aunt would have been a better person——"

"No doubt; but it is just like me to take the first sponsor who came to hand. When I am in London I half live at Mrs. Tomkison's, and I had heard her rave about you until I became feverishly anxious to make your acquaintance. I ought perhaps to have referred to Miss Fausset for my credentials—but I am *volage* by nature: and then I knew Mrs. Tomkison would exaggerate my virtues and ignore my errors."

Mildred went back to the inner room, and seated herself by the reading lamp. Castellani followed her, and placed himself on the other side of the small octagon table, leaving only a narrow space between them.

"How pale you are," he said, with a look of concern. "I hope you are not ill."

"No, I am only tired after a very long walk."

"I had no idea you had left Enderby."

"Indeed."

"You said nothing of your intention of leaving the neighbourhood the day before yesterday."

"There was no occasion to talk of my plans," Mildred answered coldly. "We were all too busy and too anxious about the concert to think of any other matter."

"Did you leave soon after the concert?"

"The same evening. I did not know you were leaving Riverdale."

"Oh, I only stayed for the concert. I had protracted my visit unconscionably, but Mrs. Hillersdon was good enough not to seem tired of me. I am in nobody's way, and I contrived to please her with my music. Did you not find her delightfully artistic?"

"I thought her manners charming; and she seems fond of music, if that is what you mean by being artistic."

"Oh, I mean worlds more than that. Mrs. Hillersdon is artistic to her fingers' ends. In everything she does one feels the artist. Her dress, her air, her way of ordering a dinner or

arranging a room—her feeling for literature—she never reads—her feeling for form and colour—she cannot draw a line—in a word, her personality is the very essence of modern art. Is Miss Ransome with you?”

“No, I have left her to keep house for me.”

It seemed a futile thing to make believe that all was well at Enderby, to ward off explanations, when before long the world must know that George Greswold and his wife were parted for ever. Some reason would have to be given. That thirst for information about the inner life of one's neighbours which is the ruling passion of this waning century must be slaked somehow. It was partly on this account, perhaps, that Mildred fancied it would be a good thing for her to enter a sisterhood. The curious could be satisfied then. It would be said that Mrs. Greswold had given up the world.

“She is a very sweet girl,” said Castellani thoughtfully; “pretty too, a delicious complexion, hair that suggests Sabrina's after a visit from the hairdresser, a delightful figure, and very nice manners—but she leaves me as cold as ice. Why is it that only a few women in the world have the true magnetic power? They are so few, and their influence is so stupendous. Think of the multitude of women of all nations, colours, and languages that go to furnish one Cleopatra or one Mary Stuart.”

Miss Fausset came into the room while he was talking and was surprised at seeing him in such easy yet earnest conversation with her niece.

“One would suppose you had known each other for years,” she said, as she shook hands with Castellani, looking from one to the other.

“And so we have,” he answered gaily; “in some lives weeks mean years. I sometimes catch myself wondering what the world was like before I knew Mrs. Greswold.”

“How long have you known her—without rhodomontade?”

“For about a month, aunt,” replied Mildred. “I have been asking Mr. Castellani why he came to me with an introduction from my friend, Mrs. Tomkison, when it would have been more natural to present himself as a friend of yours.”

“Oh, he has always a motive for what he does,” Miss Fausset said coldly. “You will stay to dinner, of course,” she added to Castellani.

“I am free for this evening, and I should like to stay, but I am not dressed for dinner.”

“I am used to irregularities from you. Give Mrs. Greswold your arm.”

Franz was at the door announcing the evening meal, and presently Mildred found herself seated at the snug round table in the sombre spacious dining-room—a room with a bayed front, commanding an illimitable extent of sea—with her aunt upon one

side of her and César Castellani on the other. The meal was livelier than the dinner of last night. Castellani appeared quite unconscious that Mildred was out of spirits. He was full of life and gaiety, and had an air of happiness which was almost contagious. His conversation was purely intellectual, ranging through the world of mind and of fancy, scarcely touching things earthly and human, and thus he struck no jarring chord, evolved no sudden pang of pain in Mildred's weary heart. So far as she could be distracted from the ever present thought of loss and sorrow, his conversation served to distract her.

He went up to the drawing-room with the two ladies, and at Miss Fausset's request sat down at once to the piano. The larger room was still in shadow, the smaller bright with fire and lamplight.

He played as only the gifted few can play, played as one in whom music is a sixth sense, but to-night his music was new to Mildred. He played none of those classic numbers which had been familiar to her since the days of her girlhood—no tender melody of Mozart's, no swelling grandeur of Beethoven's colossal muse, no graceful strain of Mendelssohn's, or passionate wail of Chopin's. His music to-night was full of airy caprices, quips and cranks, and wreathed smiles. It was operatic music, of the stage stagy; a music which seemed on a level with Watteau or Tissot in the sister art—gay to audacity and sentimental to affectation. It was charming music all the same—charged with melody, gracious, capricious, uncertain, like the smiles of an April day.

Whatever it was, every movement was familiar to Miss Fausset. She sat with her long ivory knitting-needles at rest on her lap, sat in a dreamy attitude, gazing at the fire, and listening intently. Some melodies seemed to touch her almost to tears. The love of music ran in the Fausset family, and it was no surprise to Mildred to see her aunt so absorbed. What had an elderly spinster to live for if it were not philanthropy and art? And for the plastic arts—for pictures and porcelain, statuary or high-art furniture, Miss Fausset cared not a jot, as those cold and barren drawing-rooms, with their empty walls and pallid colour, bore witness. Music she loved with a most unaffected devotion, and it was in no wise strange to find her the friend and patroness of César Castellani, opposite as were the opinions of the man who wrote "*Nepenthe*" and the woman who had helped to found the church of St. Edmund the Confessor.

(To be continued.)

MR. AND MRS. BANCROFT ON AND OFF THE STAGE.*

BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON,
AUTHOR OF "IN A GRASS COUNTRY," ETC.

AT the very zenith of their fame and in the full tide of their popularity, Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft, whose names will long and gratefully be associated by the English playgoing public with the theatrical history of this country, saw fit, for reasons of their own into which it does not become us to inquire, to retire from that foremost and honourable position which they had won for themselves no less by their great talent and untiring energy, than by the indomitable pluck and courage which carried them successfully and triumphantly through all the arduous responsibilities and difficulties of their career.

It seems but yesterday when, on the 20th of July, 1885, Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft bade a final adieu to the public, and to the infinite regret of hundreds and thousands of their admirers, retired from the stage of English Comedy which they had so long and so brilliantly adorned.

It will be fresh in the minds of all how sincerely and universally their decision was deplored at the time, and how much we all felt that we had lost of the pleasure and brightness of our lives, when their genial presence and always delightful impersonations had become merely things of the past, to be stored for ever in our grateful memory.

It is therefore with unusual interest and with unbounded satisfaction that these two volumes of personal reminiscences and theatrical recollections will be hailed by the world, and eagerly read by all those to whom the names of "Marie Wilton" and her gifted husband have long been as household words.

Written first by the wife, then by the husband, and then jointly by both, blended homogeneously into one, the "Narrative," as it is aptly called, is one that cannot fail to charm and to interest all who read it, chiefly by reason of its extreme and unpretentious simplicity, of its natural brightness, and above all of the deep underlying vein of conscientious earnestness which is breathed in every line of these charming volumes.

And here let me pause to give a special line of tribute to Mrs.

* "Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft On and Off the Stage," written by themselves. 2 vols. Bentley, London.

Bancroft's evident and hitherto unsuspected literary powers. Nothing can be more graceful than her writing or more fresh and original than her style and diction. The easy flow of language and the unstudied correctness of expression which she displays are worthy of all praise, and I venture to suggest that it were a pity indeed if at some future time she does not again take up the pen which she understands so well how to wield.

Nothing can be more touching than the story of the early years of the little Marie Wilton, who entered upon the battle of life and learnt the hard lesson of labour and of toil at an age when most children are playing with their toys in happy idleness.

Let her own pen tell the graphic story of those early days :

"Having shown when very young ability beyond my years, being taught when but four or five years old to recite poems and dramatic scenes, I was brought out as a child-actress, although hardly able to speak plainly. It was thought a great achievement then to stand alone on a big stage and recite. . . . Luckily the fashion does not exist nowadays. Fortunate children ! fortunate public ! I wish I could remember a happy childhood ; but alas ! I can remember only work and responsibility from a very tender age. No games, no romps, no toys—nothing which makes a child's life joyous. I can recollect a doll, but not the time to play with it, for we only met at night, when it shared my pillow ; and as I looked into its face before I fell asleep after my work, I often wished that I could play with it sometimes."

At the tender age of five, the child, dressed in a white frock and a blue slash, of which she was "very proud," recited Collins' "Ode to the Passions," accompanied by special music. This seems to have been almost her first public performance.

At this time the little girl and her parents, to whom she owes much of her early training for the stage, were moving about from town to town with a travelling company, amongst whom her father was an actor.

At the Theatre Royal, Manchester, she appeared in the pantomime of "Gulliver's Travels" as the little *Emperor of Lilliput*, and not long after in the same theatre she played *Prince Arthur* in "King John," which was specially produced for Miss Glyn, who came down to Manchester as a "star." It happened that old Charles Kemble was in a box watching the play in which he had once won such laurels by the side of his great brother.

The veteran actor was much impressed by the child, and was so carried away by his enthusiasm as to get up in the box and exclaim aloud : "That girl will be a great actress." Afterwards he sent for the little Marie and complimented her warmly. He gave her one piece of advice which she seems to have borne in mind all her life :

"Climb not the ladder too quickly or you may come suddenly to the ground again."

At Bristol the child-actress appeared as *No-un-un-no-Zoo*, the "Sprite of the Silver Star," and became a great favourite ; and it was here also that she acted the part of *Henri* in "Belphegor"

with Mr. Charles Dillon, to whom she owed her first London engagement. Very soon after he became manager of the Lyceum, and sent at once to her to fill the same part upon the boards of that important theatre.

The history of her first days in London is told with a touching simplicity. The humble lodgings in the Waterloo Road, where her mother in spite of their small means managed to make a comfortable home; the going backwards and forwards to the theatre to the rehearsals; the cold contemptuous looks which some of the well-dressed London actresses cast at the little country girl, whose clothes were shabby and whose name was unknown, and the harshness and rough words of the stage-manager, who found fault with her constantly, making her nervous and unhappy, and her small salary of three pounds a week, upon which she and her mother and some of her sisters, too, had to depend upon, make up a sad picture of the first struggling days of the young actress in the great city.

Yet here it was probably that she learnt the most, and laid up valuable experience for her future career. Amongst the actors in "Belphegor" was Mr. J. L. Toole, whose name was as yet unmade, and whose kind jokes and friendly encouragement helped to cheer the heart and keep up the fainting spirits of the shy and frightened girl.

"At last the opening night arrived; the house was crammed, and when Mr. Dillon as *Belphegor*, Mrs. Dillon as *Madeline*, his wife Toole at the back beating a drum, and I, seated like a boy on a horse, came on to the stage, there was a tremendous reception I had little or nothing to say on my first appearance At the end of the act, where my best scene occurred with Mr. Dillon, the applause was tremendous, and there was a great call. I waited, hoping and expecting to be taken before the curtain by Mr. Dillon; but my friend the stage-manager turned round to me sharply, saying: 'Now then, Miss Wilton, go to your room, you are not wanted.' I walked slowly away towards the dressing-rooms I reached my room, where my mother was anxiously waiting to know how I had succeeded. 'Were you called before the curtain?' she asked. I was on the point of replying, when the call-boy came running along the corridor shouting, 'Miss Wilton! Miss Wilton! make haste! Mr. Dillon says you must go on before the curtain.' Away I went, almost on wings, in case I should be too late, and heard the welcome sound from the public, 'Miss Wilton! Miss Wilton!' I went on *alone*, my little figure on that big stage, with no one by my side, and no one's hand to help me."

The next day the newspapers were full of complimentary notices of the young *débutante*, and Marie Wilton was launched at once into the full tide of her successful career.

The next step was an engagement at the Haymarket, where Miss Wilton made a great success as *Cupid* in an extravaganza called "Atalanta, or The Golden Apples;" but on leaving the Haymarket for an engagement at the Adelphi she obtained only a succession of small parts, and for some time the opportunity of getting on did not come to her. It was at this time, during the run of an extravaganza called "Cupid and Psyche," that Marie Wilton, who acted *Cupid*, fell dangerously ill with congestion of the lungs, the result of a chill caught whilst waiting about under

the stage to rise through a trap door. She was brought almost to death's door, and a time of sad anxiety ensued to the family, who were mainly dependent upon the salary, which ceased with her inability to attend at the theatre. On her recovery she returned to the Adelphi, but was fortunately released from her unprofitable engagement there by the pulling down of the old theatre. Almost immediately she signed an engagement with Miss Swanborough to act under her management at the Strand Theatre. This was an important step in Marie Wilton's career; for several seasons she acted in successive burlesques at the Strand, always taking the part of pert boys and of cupids, much to her quaintly-expressed disgust.

"Season after season I found myself still a boy. When I was talking with my mother one day I exclaimed, 'Oh, dear me, why can't I be allowed to be a girl? It's all very well to be a favourite with the public, and to be told that I am so natural and real in a boy's dress. If so, why was I not born a boy?' . . . If I could have been sometimes cast for girls I should have grown more patient; but those cupids had made authors think and the public believe that I could not play anything but boys."

For a long time she was always either "Cupid" or "Little:" "The Little Treasure," "The Little Savage," "The Little Don Giovanni," and even "The Little Devil." The desire of her heart was to act comedy, for no doubt she felt her powers to be far beyond the burlesque parts to which she was so long doomed; but it was not for some time to come that she was able to realize her ambition.

It was towards the end of her engagement, and upon the occasion of a summer trip to Liverpool, to which Mrs. Swanborough took down her company to play a burlesque entitled "Orpheus," that Marie Wilton first met Mr. Bancroft.

At this point Mr. Bancroft takes up the pen to tell the story of his early experiences. As a youth he had a passion for theatrical matters, and was excessively fond of going to the play, and on more than one occasion he saw Marie Wilton act in her early days in London, little thinking that she would one day be his wife. He was nineteen years of age when, being forced to settle upon a career, he determined, although quite without friends in the profession, to seek his fortune upon the stage. He thus describes his first engagement:

"After addressing a shoal of letters to the lessees of leading country theatres, to most of which I received no answers, Mr. Mercer Simpson, of Birmingham, found something in my appeal, I suppose, a little removed from the ruck of such effusions, for he sent me an encouraging reply, and expressed a wish to see me. . . . I left my home with a very heavy heart and a very light purse on the 1st of January, 1861. It was a wretched cold day when I walked up New Street to the Theatre Royal, and sent in my name to Mr. Mercer Simpson. . . . After kind advice it was arranged that I might regard myself as a member of the company, with a commencing salary of one guinea a week."

For this modest sum Mr. Bancroft acted for some time in an immense number and variety of characters, chiefly of the "blood and thunder" sort, appearing nightly as the "victim or perpetrator

of a wide range of the vilest crimes." From Birmingham he went repeatedly on tour to other provincial towns, and it was whilst acting at Devonport that he received an offer from John Harris, of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, to join his company in a considerably better position than that which he occupied at Birmingham. At Dublin he did good work and attracted much attention. He acted with the best actors—Charles and Frank Matthews, Charles Kean, Sothern, Madame Celeste, and many others who paid flying visits to the capital of the Sister Isle. In this way his experiences became enlarged and his talent gradually but surely developed, so that when he met Marie Wilton for the first time at Liverpool, he was already an accomplished and finished comedian.

We now come to an epoch in the lives of Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft of the utmost importance to them both—their joint career at the Prince of Wales' Theatre.

Marie Wilton was at this time much exercised in her mind concerning her future. She had arrived at a point when she felt it imperative to her interests to strike out into a line of her own. It was impossible that she could continue to waste her powers for ever upon pantomimes, and she could obtain no engagement that would release her from that particular form of acting from which she longed to be free. Mr. Buckstone offered to engage her again at once if she would consent to act *Cupid* once more, but he could only associate her with "the merry sauciness of that wicked little boy." This was no sort of use to her. She was in despair. At this juncture a member of her family suggested that she should take a theatre of her own. The idea took her breath away.

"My heart seemed to stop beating," she says, "and like a lull after a storm, everything seemed for the moment to stand still."

But the suggestion once made was not to be abandoned. Her brother-in-law came to her rescue with the loan of a thousand pounds, and with this comparatively small sum she resolved to embark upon her great speculation.

Mr. Byron at the same time as herself was about to sever his connection with the Strand Theatre, and she proposed to him that he should enter into partnership with her, Byron not to find any money, but to give her his exclusive services as an author. These preliminaries having been satisfactorily arranged, the next thing was to find a theatre; and the Queen's Theatre, Tottenham Street, being at the moment in the market, they made immediate inquiries concerning it. Everything that could be said to her to dissuade her from taking such a place was urged by her friends.

"I was implored by every one I consulted to reflect before entering on such an enterprise. 'The neighbourhood was awful.' 'The distance too great from the fashionable world.' 'Nothing would ever make it a first-class theatre.' People shrugged their shoulders, and I could see that failure was foretold in every feature. So I stood alone without one word of encouragement. Mr. Byron grew less sanguine."

Yet in spite of opposition and discouragement Miss Wilton stuck bravely to her determination, and how entirely wrong all these gloomy prognostics turned out to be, the splendid success which rewarded her pluck and courage has amply shown.

It required courage indeed to face such a neighbourhood and to improve such a theatre! After the lease had been signed and sealed and all the arrangements of the new management definitely settled, Miss Wilton went one evening with Mr. and Mrs. Byron to a private box at the old Queen's to inspect her new property. The spectacle was a somewhat appalling one.

"It was a clean well-conducted little house, but oh, the audience! My heart sank! Some of the occupants of the stalls were engaged between the acts in devouring oranges (their faces being buried in them) and drinking ginger beer. Babies were being rocked to sleep or smacked to be quiet. A woman looked up to our box, and seeing us staring aghast, with, I suppose, an expression of horror upon my face, shouted, 'Now then, you three stuck-up ones, come out o' that, or I'll send this 'ere orange at your 'eds.' Mr. Byron went to the back of the box and laughed until we thought he would be ill."

The first use to which the thousand pounds was put was that of thoroughly cleaning, purifying, and re-decorating the house after the departure of the last of these unsavoury audiences.

That the Prince of Wales' should have grown out of the Queen's is a standing contradiction to the often-urged objection to taking a theatre in a low neighbourhood, and a living proof that the best of the British public do not care a brass farthing where a theatre is situated so long as the performance at it is good.

By the time the first night arrived there remained but £150 out of the thousand pounds. The decorations were simple and inexpensive, but pretty and in good taste, the stalls being covered with pale blue, with white lace antimacassars over them; the public little thought that just before the doors opened on the first night, the young manageress was standing on a high stool nailing up the lace curtains in a private box.

Miss Wilton began her venture with great caution, and wisely included a burlesque in her first programme. By this means she ensured an immediate success and paved the way for further experiments. The Prince of Wales' was opened at Easter, and on the 10th of June a new comedy by Mr. Byron in two acts, entitled "War to the Knife," was successfully produced, in which Marie Wilton obtained at last the desire of her heart and acted in a really good part and was happy.

In the programme of this new play appears the name of the young actor she had met at Liverpool—Mr. Bancroft—who thus acted in his future wife's company, and at the same time curiously enough before a London audience for the first time in his life.

"'In June,' he says, 'I had my first chance in Byron's comedy, "War to the Knife." I was cast for a sort of man about town—one *Captain Thistleton*—and to that character I certainly am indebted for the opportunity of gaining some notice from the critics and the public.'"

After this the fortunes of Mr. Bancroft and Miss Wilton were never again dissociated. And now occurred an event which goes far to justify that touch of superstition which Mrs. Bancroft reveals to us in her character, and to prove to the world what she herself firmly believes in: that she was predestined to good fortune.

A play by a poor and unknown writer, which had been offered in turn to half the London managers, which Sothorn and Alfred Wigan had refused, and of which Buckstone had said that it "must fail wherever it was produced," was brought to Miss Wilton. Against the opinion of all these competent judges, against the opinion too of her own partner, Mr. Byron, Miss Wilton's judgment was in favour of the discarded and despised play. It was declared to be "dangerous;" she replied that "danger was better than dulness," and insisted upon accepting it. The result has proved incontestably the correctness of Miss Wilton's judgment.

That play was "Society," by Mr. W. T. Robertson.

"Society," produced on the 11th of November, 1865, with an exceptionally strong cast, including Mr. Hare, then a rising young actor of great promise, Mr. Bancroft, Mr. Clarke, Mr. Hill, Miss Larkin, and Miss Wilton herself, took the town by storm, and became the first of a long list of triumphs with which the name of Robertson and the Prince of Wales' Theatre will be for ever associated.

The production of "Ours" in the following year added further laurels to its author's name, and yet further successes to the gallant little company in Tottenham Street. The squalid streets were crowded nightly with fashionable carriages, the seats were booked weeks before hand, another row was added to the stalls, and when in the following April the comedy of "Caste," by the same brilliant pen, was announced, its unparalleled reception was almost a foregone conclusion.

Country companies were made up and sent off to Liverpool and to Manchester, and a full tide of prosperity set steadily in for the managers of the Prince of Wales'.

A revival of "Society" in the season of 1868-69 includes in the programme the names of William Terriss and of that handsome and gifted young actor, Mr. H. J. Montague, whose career, alas! was destined to be cut so sadly short. It seems indeed to have always been Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's good fortune to secure the services of the cleverest actors of the day, and they appear to have possessed to a high degree the faculty of discerning the latent talent in those who were as yet untried and unknown. Of Terriss Mr. Bancroft writes:

"During the previous summer we were constantly told by the maid-servant that 'a young gentleman' had called who seemed very persistent about seeing us. One day on returning from a walk the girl informed me that the 'young gentleman' had pushed past her and walked into our little drawing-room, where he then was. I

joined our visitor, rather angrily, but was soon disarmed by the frank manner of a very young man. . . . Of course the 'young gentleman' was stage struck, and wanted to go upon the stage, adding that he 'was resolved that we should give him an engagement.' His courage, and I say his cool perseverance, amused and amazed me; the very force of his determined manner conquered me, and the upshot of our interview was that I did engage him. His name was William Terriss, and *Lord Clondrays*, in 'Society,' was the part in which he made his first appearance on a London stage."

On Saturday, January 16, 1869, the production of "School"—perhaps the most popular of all the Robertsonian comedies—was greeted by an unprecedented amount of enthusiasm:

"The demand for seats was extraordinary, and such as we had never known before; extra stalls were added to a considerable number, and the receipts of the theatre were much increased, opening in fact before us a vista of prosperity such as we had not dreamed of."

The *Times* described the production of a new comedy by Mr. Robertson at the Prince of Wales' as "one of the most important events of the dramatic year," and the new piece outran its predecessors; and although, as Mrs. Bancroft rightly says, "it cannot be compared in dramatic sense with 'Caste' or 'Ours,'" yet it grew to be the greatest favourite of all Robertson's works, chiefly, it must be acknowledged, owing to Mrs. Bancroft's own inimitable rendering of the part of *Naomi Tighe*, the clever and audacious school-girl, a part which was most peculiarly suited to her.

The last of Robertson's plays was "M.P.," and shows internal evidence, alas, of his then failing powers and rapidly increasing ill-health. Most of it was dictated from his sick-bed, and Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft were naturally most painfully anxious lest the result should be a lamentable falling away from his former comedies. No doubt owing to this sad cause it is a much weaker and altogether an inferior work; but so great at the time was the *prestige* of his name, and so superhuman were the efforts of the company to give it all the advantage of a perfect and well-studied rendering, that the success of "M.P." on the first night was to the full as great as that of any of its predecessors. Poor Robertson was unable to be present, but special messengers were sent off to him between every act to report progress, and the success of his latest effort no doubt prolonged for a little while the flickering flame of his now fast ebbing life.

After his death, it became a very serious subject with Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft as to how, failing perpetual revivals, they were to keep up the fortunes and the high reputation of their little theatre. After anxious deliberation they decided to produce Lord Lytton's comedy of "Money," with a result which amply justified their selection, and the seasons of 1872 and 1873 were taken up with that and with Wilkie Collins' "Man and Wife," which latter ran to one hundred and thirty-six nights.

The beginning of the season of 1874 found them prepared with

a new and a singularly bold venture. Sheridan's immortal comedy, "The School for Scandal," was to be produced upon the boards of the Prince of Wales' Theatre with a sumptuousness of stage management and an elaborateness of costume and of scenery which had never before been equalled in any London theatre. The expenses of these preparations were naturally very great, and to meet them Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft took a new and somewhat perilous departure: they raised the price of the stalls from seven to ten shillings; and their example having been speedily followed by all the other managers in London, the price of stalls has remained permanently raised ever since. The result has no doubt been eminently satisfactory to the managers, but whether the measure has proved equally agreeable to that portion of the playgoing public which is more given to smothered murmurs than to open rebellion against decrees which they are utterly powerless to resist, is perhaps not so easy to determine. Stall-goers are, however, not ungenerous, and so long as the play is good they will cheerfully pay their extra shillings and say nothing about them; it is only when he remembers that the good, bad and indifferent are all equally costly that the Briton's inherent desire to "see his money's worth" occasionally asserts itself in bitter grumblings until this very day.

At "The School for Scandal" at least, there was no lack of eager audiences, and the brilliancy of the stage effects, as well as the excellence of the acting of the piece, caused it to run successfully throughout the season.

The little theatre was now all too small for the crowds that flocked to it and for the due mounting of the important plays that were destined to succeed Sheridan's comedy; and opportunity having offered it to Mr. Bancroft, he purchased the lease of the Haymarket Theatre under a provision that he was to reconstruct and rebuild the whole of the interior.

This work was begun in September, 1879, and concluded, by dint of almost superhuman efforts, by the end of the following January, when the theatre was re-opened with Lord Lytton's "Money," and the unseemly riot which occurred on the opening night on the occasion of the doing away with the pit is still fresh in the minds of most of us. However, the discontent was shortly quelled, and after a few nights the new arrangements worked well and created no more disturbances, and for five successive seasons the fortunes of the Haymarket Theatre were conducted as ably and as triumphantly by Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft as those of the smaller house had been.

There were those, perhaps, who regretted the palmy days of the little theatre in Tottenham Street, and who think still that nothing at the larger house ever touched the enthusiasm which always attended the production of a new comedy by Robertson, or the genuine appreciation of such cleverly transplanted French plays

as "Peril" and "Diplomacy;" yet there is no doubt that the Haymarket Theatre, never hitherto considered a lucky house, reached during this judicious management a degree of prosperity to which it had never attained before. Mrs. Bancroft herself appears to have long regretted the smaller house, of which she often speaks as "home," and which she regarded with tender feelings of affection long after she had left it for ever; and more than once she records how she went back with a saddened heart to gaze upon the now deserted scene of so much happiness and so many triumphs.

During the shorter occupancy of the Haymarket Theatre many highly successful representations were given, of which "Masks and Faces" was perhaps the most effective, the part of *Peg Woffington* by Mrs. Bancroft being seconded by Mr. Bancroft as *Triplet*. This character is perhaps indeed his best and most highly finished impersonation; and Mr. Bancroft, who has so often made us laugh, may be congratulated on the rare pathos at which he made us weep in this most touching rendering of the poor threadbare writer of plays.

"Masks and Faces" will probably often be played again, but it can never be better acted than it was by Mrs. Bancroft as *Peg* and her husband as *Triplet*.

"Odette," by Victorien Sardou, was also one of the greatest of the later successes, Madame Modjeska adding in no small degree to the strength of the cast; and "Fedora," another of Sardou's plays adapted by Herman Merivale, had also a long and a brilliant run.

It would be impossible to make special mention here of all the numerous plays in which Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft did good work during their long term of theatrical management, nor to enumerate in detail all the different characters which they so cleverly impersonated. Suffice it to say that the whole character and tone of the English stage has been so immensely improved and raised by their untiring efforts that their names must be ever esteemed by all those to whom English art is dear.

In these pleasant pages there will be found much that will amuse and more that will interest; comic adventures and often delightfully funny anecdotes, are interspersed with numerous notes and letters from great men, some dead and gone, others fortunately still amongst us; graceful stories of deeds of charity and kindness, with quaint sayings and apposite retorts of writers and of actors whose names have become historical, whilst many persons well known in the picturesque world of literature and of art with whom they were at different times acquainted, flit across the pages of these entertaining volumes.

During their tenancy of the Haymarket, the Bancrofts, having well won the right to take life in a somewhat easier fashion than of old, sublet the theatre during the autumn and winter months, and occupied it themselves only during the season. This enabled

them to indulge in an annual trip abroad, and many of their experiences in Switzerland and in Paris are pleasantly related. The merry parties of friends who met at Pontresina, the entertainments in aid of the new English Church and other local charities, of which they and Mr. Arthur Cecil were the main promoters, and the mountain excursions and lake expeditions in both the Engadine and the Tyrol, must have created a very welcome change to the little party of London comedians, tired out with hard work and nightly labours.

Mrs. Bancroft, towards the end of the second volume of the book, lets us into her own private fancies and predilections concerning the characters which she acted, and she unhesitatingly gives the palm of preference to *Naomi Tighe*, in "School." She tells us that 'dear Nummy' was her favourite impersonation, and the public will perhaps be ready to agree with her that of all the parts she filled, not one ever surpassed that truly delightful school maiden, who stands out with a conspicuous charm in the memory of every one of us who ever saw her. Mrs. Bancroft, however, does not specially mention that truly exquisite piece of acting of herself and her husband in Mr. Gilbert's delicious little duologue of "Sweethearts"—than which a more perfect little gem was never placed upon the English stage.

It is perhaps impossible for us properly to express our heartfelt gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft for all the happy hours which they have in time past afforded to us all; but when we call to mind those departed pleasures we can be thankful still that we have enjoyed them ourselves and sincerely sorry to think that our children can never do so.

The perfect ovation which attended their farewell to the stage, on the 20th of July, 1885, is not yet forgotten in London. Such a scene has not often been enacted within the walls of a theatre, and the heartfelt emotion and sincere affection which was then displayed towards Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft by the comparatively small section of their admirers who were crowded within the walls of the Haymarket Theatre does but represent the universal feeling which all England entertains towards them. The two volumes which they have now given to the world will be read far and wide with an interest kindled by those grateful and affectionate sympathies which, by their devotion to their profession and their earnest efforts to elevate and improve the English stage, they have implanted in the hearts of the public, no less than by the kindness and courtesy which they have invariably shown to their fellow artists and to their many friends of all degrees. In short, Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft's Narrative is a delightful and most readable book, and will undoubtedly take a foremost place amongst the literature of the day.

A SPIRIT-LOVE.

I'VE sought for love through all the year,
Unceasing sought both far and near ;
Longing again to fondly rest
Upon some faithful, loving breast ;
Seeking a kindred soul to find,
And by sweet sympathy to bind
Our life together in its spell,
And never for one hour to dwell
Apart—alone—but ever near,
Bound closely in those chains so dear ;
But I have sought, alas ! in vain,
Through tears, and bitterness and pain.

Once in a singer's mellow voice,
Its tone made all my heart rejoice ;
Here dwells the love I seek ! I cried,
But when the song had ceased, love died ;
Again I thought I saw it shine,
In eyes that gazed deep into mine—
I only saw reflected there
The love that I alone did bear ;
And once again I thought I felt
Its thrill, as on my lips there dwelt
A kiss so warm and sweet—alas !
E'en as it burned, I felt love pass.

A poet's verse my soul deep stirr'd,
Love breath'd in every glowing word,
But like a dream, supremely fair,
It fled, and all my life was bare ;
Why should Love, who seeking ever
Me to bind, his chains thus sever ?
Because a spirit-love doth claim,
And jealous guard the sacred flame
That glows and burns within my heart,
Clear, bright and pure, from earth apart,
Until Death's portals wide are thrown,
And to *that Love* my soul hath flown.

ANNA COMTESSE DE BRÉMONT.

A SEA CHANGE.

By MRS. HOUSTOUN,

AUTHOR OF "RECOMMENDED TO MERCY," "HIS BESETTING SIN," ETC.

"WELL, it is simply a choice of evils! Eversleigh must take his choice between being denounced as a scoundrel or regarded as a fool. He knows that as well as I do, so nothing more need be said about the matter."

It was a surly old bachelor who spoke, a man of the world, worldly, and one who from long and intimate acquaintance with that world, was in the habit—a state of things which he thoroughly enjoyed—of receiving the confidences of his friends and giving advice, in very oracular fashion, on such knotty points as occasionally baffled even the most self-appreciating applicants for his counsels. His name was Luxmore, and time was when, as a diner-out, his *bons mots* were quoted, and his society sought for by the highest placed in the world of fashion. Those were the days when Crockford's "tip-top" *Hell* was patronized by all who had any pretensions to be classed amongst the *élite* of society, and those likewise were the days when Billy Luxmore, one of the richest, the ugliest, as well as the most popular men in London, came, by reason of that "Hell," to grief.

Amongst the very few examples extant of men who having suddenly fallen from a high social pinnacle to almost ruin have still retained the friendship of their fellows, may be cited poor, out-at-elbows Billy Luxmore, and when the Earl of Montessor called on the ex-millionaire in his little *pied-à-terre* in Paris to ask his advice regarding the future conduct of his only son, Lord Eversleigh, the nobleman, whose yearly income was estimated at £60,000, put himself—metaphorically speaking—at the foot of the oracle whom he had come to Paris purposely to consult.

"There is nothing against the girl, you say," said Mr. Luxmore, when he, crouching—for it was a cold March day—over a wretched fire of quickly-burning wood, had listened attentively to his visitor's tale of woe.

"Oh no, nothing at all!—that is, nothing *really*. A flirtation or two, for she is deuced pretty, and I hardly wonder at Eversleigh making a fool of himself; but we couldn't listen for a moment to his marrying her. A wretched connection, don't you know. Scandal about her mother, an old story, but it would of course

be raked up again, unless Eversleigh does the only wise thing, which is, to throw the whole blame upon me, and say that if he marries the girl he quarrels with me for life."

It was after listening to this explanation that Billy Luxmore, who, in spite of his fifty years and his chronic state of bachelorhood, was not altogether destitute of kindly feelings, uttered the words with which this story opens. He was in truth sorry in his way for Ella Conynghame, and felt no little contempt for both the father and the son who were thus heartlessly conspiring against her peace of mind. The conventionalities of life had, however, to be respected, and hence the opinion—one which appeared neither to surprise nor to offend his visitor—he with cynical calm delivered.

"I am afraid you are right," said the Earl, "and it is altogether a most confounded bore. What makes the whole thing worse is, that Miss Conynghame, who appears to be a very susceptible young lady, is giving out, or her friends are doing so for her, that for love of Eversleigh she is going into a decline. My wife's eldest brother, who is as good-natured a fellow as ever breathed, is starting in his yacht, the "Sybil," next week for a cruise South, and he has offered to take the girl with him."

"But Lady Hancock, who, I am told, is to be of the yachting party, how will she like," inquired Mr. Luxmore, "having a sick and moping girl quartered upon her?"

"Oh! she will not mind," answered Lord Montessor, adding, with a mimicry of his sister-in-law's plaintive accents, which failed to produce a smile upon his companion's lips, "as long as dear Sir John is pleased, I am pleased, our excellent Grizel says, so that I am not afraid of the plan falling through on that score. There will be a doctor on board, and the Admiralty has given permission to one of their first-rate officers to be sailing-master to the "Sybil." In short, nothing can look more promising. The sea air, and change, and all that sort of thing will help to put Eversleigh out of her head, and before the yacht returns it is to be hoped that the young lady will be herself again."

Now the self of the young lady in question chanced to be rather an anomalous one. She was certainly, as the Earl had remarked, not a little susceptible, and in setting her cap at Lord Eversleigh she had flown at high game, but for all that her nature was a passionate one and her ambition vaulting, she was capable of being touched to her heart's core by what she deemed an heroic and a self-sacrificing act. Her family, one and all, were of the kind of which it is vulgarly said that they think no small beer of themselves. They (her parents, *id est*) were proud of their common descent (for they had been cousins) from a good old Scotch race, whilst Ella's beauty encouraged them to hope that she would, by marrying a nobleman, raise them still higher on the

ladder of social life. The hitch in their daughter's promising flirtation with Lord Eversleigh troubled them not a little. They did not, however, despair of eventual success, and the offer of Sir John Hancock, whose sister had been married, for her large portion, by Lord Eversleigh's father, encouraged them to hope that all would come right in time. Sir John's proposal that Ella should, for her health's sake, be a guest during a lengthened cruise on board the "Sybil" was gratefully acceded to, and preparations in the shape of outfit for the invalid were immediately commenced.

Lord Eversleigh, although he was rather a weak young man, and very decidedly deficient in moral courage, was no systematic deceiver. He was fond of Ella, and to sun himself in her bright eyes, and gaze adoringly on her chestnut hair and brilliant colouring, was to him very pleasant pastime; but from these dreams of bliss there had come a somewhat rude awakening. Mr. Conynghame, after what he considered a reasonable amount of waiting, questioned him concerning his intentions, and then the truth came out. Eversleigh, in sudden alarm, and driven to bay, took shelter behind the ægis of his father's name, and declared that without the Earl's consent it was out of his power—great as was his love for and his admiration of Miss Conynghame—to marry. The blow was, as I said before, a heavy one, but there was hope in the distance, and in the firm belief that her aristocratic admirer was still, in the face of paternal opposition, her devoted slave, Ella, in the character of an interesting invalid, took possession of her prettily fitted-up cabin on board the "Sybil." Nor was she the only adventurous individual who in search of health was about to brave, in a yacht of two hundred tons burden, the perils of distant seas. Mr. John Boscawen, a young man whose gift of an exquisite tenor voice, and his perseverance in pushing towards the front, had given him a certain standing in "society," was threatened with consumption; and as his medical attendant advised, as the best means of cure, just such a voyage as the "Sybil" was about to undertake, the invalid caused his purpose to set sail for warmer climes to be at once promulgated. Now Lady Hancock adored music, and moreover the *petits soins* of a young man who through especial circumstances was undoubtedly—to borrow a phrase from his more enterprising acquaintances—something of a "duffer," soothed and flattered her; she therefore, with the full consent of "dear good-natured Sir John," invited Mr. Boscawen to bear them company on their voyage. The invalid's own proclivities would have resulted in his being a "masher" of the first order, but the fates were against the fulfilment of his ambitious dreams. In appearance he was essentially what the French call *mesquin*; his head was large, his hair straight, and his eyes round; moreover, although his worldly means would have enabled him to entertain "a score of tailors to adorn his body," that same body signally failed to convey the impression that it was that of a gentleman born. In his own

opinion, his merits, both personal and intellectual, took high rank, a circumstance which caused Sir John, who nourished a great contempt for the effeminate of his own sex, to remark that he would be sorry to buy John Boscawen at his own price, and sell him by auction to the highest bidder.

The naval officer of whom Lord Montessor had spoken to Mr. Luxmore, was a remarkably well-looking man. His manners were, if in a slight degree unpolished, pleasantly frank and sailor-like, whilst the doctor, who in common with Lieutenant Masterton, messed with the owners and their guests, was a well-meaning as well as an intelligent member of his profession. The voyage was at its commencement, and, until the long-promised trade winds were fallen in with, uncomfortable enough. They met, as a matter of course, in the Bay of Biscay, with both high and baffling winds; so annoying indeed was the lengthened gale which prevailed, that Sir John, who as an old yachting man held steam in profound contempt, found himself sometimes on the verge of regretting (so tired was he of the everlasting morning question of "How's her head?") that he had not followed the advice of his more practical friends, and in lieu of the sailing schooner "Sybil," with her huge white sails and exquisite "poetry of motion," invested in a safe, steady-going steam yacht. Ella, who was new to the sea, had suffered not a little both from seasickness and from fright. When the "Sybil" laid well over on her side, and the "ready about" of the master's powerful voice was productive of sounds so awfully crashing that she thought her last moments were approaching, her heart absolutely failed her for fear, and her only solace lay in the sight of sturdy Lieutenant Masterton, clad in his pilot coat and wet sou'-wester, walking the deck with perfect unconcern, his hands in his pockets, and a cigar between his lips. Miss Conynghame was much too deeply imbued with family pride for the possibility of even an approach to a flirtation with the yacht's sailing-master to cross her mind. Moreover, she was, she told herself, the affianced bride—in heart and soul at least—of Lord Eversleigh. Captain Masterton (for he was given brevet rank on board the "Sybil") was, however, by right of his profession, a gentleman; and when the wet deck was at an angle of 45, and the sea, rising mountains high, rendered the keeping of her equilibrium no easy matter, she was glad enough to accept the support of the captain's arm, and to cling with desperate energy to his stalwart shoulder. But when the danger—for in her eyes, danger it had been—was over, when the sea was smooth again, and when Madeira and the Canary Islands had been left behind, then Ella, woman-like, banished from her memory the kindly attentions of her sailor-friend, and even allowed herself to make fun, when he was not present to hear her, with John Boscawen, at sundry peculiarities which in the demeanour of the honest captain had fallen under her notice.

"I wonder," she said one day, when, the heat being intense, the little party, with the exception of the master, Sir John, and the doctor, were seated under the quarter-deck awning, "what makes Captain Masterton knock his biscuits upon the edge of the table before he puts a morsel of them into his mouth?"

"Oh, that," rejoined Mr. Boscawen promptly, "is because he chooses to do everything man-of-war fashion. It is a way they have in the Navy Stores Department, to give out what the men call weevelly biscuits, and in the ward-room, if the officers happen to be particular, the creatures—kind of maggots, you know—are in this way, shaken out."

"How very horrid," cried Ella. "Fancy eating such disgusting animals. Living ones too, I suppose. It makes one absolutely shudder to think of it."

"I wish," said Lady Hancock languidly, "that Mr. Masterton was not quite so fond of fancying himself on board a Queen's ship. That every morning holy stoning of the decks is a great trial. Sir John likes it, otherwise——"

But here the plaintive tones of her voice were broken in upon by the entrance of Sir John himself beneath the awning. He came in, panting heavily, and, throwing himself on a long cane-bottomed chair, exclaimed, after a harmless invective against the heat:

"Like it! I should think I do. Why, what a state the decks would be in if they were to be scrubbed no oftener than, as Dana tells us, they are in the Yankee merchant service. Writing of the men he says:

'Six days shalt they labour, and do all that they are able,
And on the seventh, holy stone the decks and scrape the cable.'

Masterton is a first-rate fellow for keeping everything ship-shape, and he is capital too at finding employment for the men. Look for'ard at him now. He's got them all in this confounded heat, shark fishing. By Jove! five minutes ago, one of the monsters as nearly as possible got hold of the tallow candle that they've baited the hook with. I wish I could persuade you, Miss Conynghame, to come for'ard a moment and watch the fun."

"Oh! I couldn't. It's too awfully hot even here, and where they are fishing it must be positively killing."

"Is there any chance of a breeze?" asked Mr. Boscawen. "Fifteen days of dead calm in the tropics is no joke."

"Far from it," responded Sir John, with rather provoking composure; "and if it goes on much longer it may be a case of 'water, water everywhere, and never a drop to drink.' Masterton has known a dead calm like this last, just where we are, that is, within a few hours' sail of Barbadoes, for thirty days."

"How awful!" ejaculated Boscawen, who under the influence of the blazing tropic sun was rapidly melting away, and who

possessed no longer energy sufficient to enable him even to warble in a whisper a few of the "wood notes wild" with which, after the gale had subsided, he had more than once delighted his audience.

"Yes, it's bad luck," rejoined Sir John; "and it isn't for want of whistling for a breeze, for Masterton has never ceased piping up since the calm set in. I rather wish," this with a wink at Ella, and a side glance at Boscawen, "that they may succeed in gaffing a shark. They are not bad eating I have been told. Rather like very young veal, don't you know. 'Staggering bobs' the breeders call them, but if all Dolland's sauces didn't come to grief off Vigo, we shall be able to rough it on the big dog-fish's carcase still."

At the end of the thirty days' calm which Captain Masterton announced as a by no means rare occurrence, he, to the universal joy of all on board, announced a sudden and tremendous fall in the barometer. Gladly did the uninitiated listen to the sounds of preparation for the coming change which were everywhere apparent, and so light of heart had John Boscawen become that he was heard to warble gaily the refrain of a song which he had caught from one of the crew, as they upped anchor at Gravesend:

"Oh, what a row, what a racket, and a rioting,
A ship is a thing that you never can be quiet in."

And row and racketing enough there very soon was, for something nearly approaching to a West Indian hurricane had speedily to be weathered. The sea, which for more than four weeks had been calm as a summer's lake, was lashed into fury. The forked lightning played round the yacht, as with doubled-reefed sails she ploughed her way over the grand waste of waters, and the roar of heaven's artillery sent a thrill of awe through the breasts of the unexperienced passengers. The rain, meanwhile, fell in blinding torrents, and lo! when the gale was at its height, and the services of every sailor on board were needed for the safety of the yacht, there suddenly arose the startling cry of "a man overboard." Ella, terrified by the storm, was cowering for shelter under the weather bulwarks. It was with her a favourite position, seeing that she could, whilst under that comparative shelter, scan the countenances of the sailors, and thus, without asking troublesome questions, and betraying a contemptible amount of cowardice, be enabled to in some degree judge for herself, whether the vessel was in danger of shipwreck. On hearing the shout, which above the noise and uproar of the storm made itself distinctly heard, every heart stood still, and a moment of fearful suspense followed. All eyes were turned upon the surging billows, and Ella with the rest, was feeling her breath grow short and thick, when, after a short but loudly spoken word of command, she saw Captain Masterton plunge over the bulwark into the raging sea. It was the work of a moment. Had he hesitated or delayed, the man would have been lost, for to

lower a boat was as impossible as the attempt to do so would have been useless. He was a strong swimmer, that brave sailor who risked his life for his fellow-man, and he was so fortunate as to see and clutch the life buoy that was thrown to him. Happily also, the man to whose rescue he had gone kept his wits about him, and was not without some knowledge of the useful art in which his superior officer excelled, and so between them they fought a good fight against the dangers which beset them. The "Sybil," whilst the awful period of suspense lasted, was by Masterton's hurried orders lying to, and during the temporary lull which her brief inaction caused, the life-buoy with the two half-drowned men clinging for bare life to its thrice-blessed support, were drawn, amidst ringing cheers, up the crowded side of the vessel. What was the impulse which at that moment caused Ella Conynghame's young heart to beat as it had never in her life-time done before? Why was it that unbidden tears rose to her eyelids, and that she felt a longing to throw herself at the feet of that courageous man, and pour out there her admiration of the deed which he had done? Surely it could be only hero-worship—only the natural appreciation of heroic deeds, which not to be conscious of is, especially in the young, suggestive of hardness of heart and absence of generous sympathy. Ella did not attempt to analyze her feelings. She placed an entire though perhaps too unquestioning a faith in the pride of family which formed a portion of her inheritance, for the possibility of her being in love with this somewhat rough-mannered and doubtless plebeian-by-birth sailor to have even occurred to her, and yet, all unknown to herself, her behaviour towards Henry Masterton became, after his noble action, insensibly softened. She shut her eyes to the trifling errors of speech and action which had before struck her as symptomatic of his ignorance of good society, and no longer either felt or looked offended when the perfume of tobacco smoke, mingled with that of damp pilot cloth, was wafted through the slightly too near neighbourhood of the sailing-master's cabin to her delicate nostrils. John Boscawen saw the change, and suspecting its cause, his vanity rose up in arms against the girl who had the bad taste to give more of her smiles to that "unlicked sea-bear" (as he in his heart called Captain Masterton), than to him. He was himself a man of unknown antecedents, but he was clever, had taken his degree, and to crown all, had won the "Newdegate;" also he had seen something of the stratum of society which is a shade below that in which the Lord Eversleighs of the world were wont to figure, and had acquired something of its jargon: under these circumstances he could, he felt, afford to look superior down upon a "fellow" like Masterton, who, because he could swim like a fish, had gained a much larger amount of *kudos* than he actually deserved.

"A great strong, hulking fellow like that—what was a plunge in the water to him?" was a remark which the envious tenor

made one day to Ella. "Risked his life, indeed! Nonsense. He knew very well that the life-buoy would save him, and any man—strong and active as he is—would have done the same."

"But the sharks," remonstrated Ella. "Every one says that from them came almost the worst danger that he ran," and she shuddered visibly as the thought of the self-sacrificing hero's risk of terrible mutilation flashed across her mind. John Boscawen's assertion that any other man possessed of strength of limb, and who enjoyed the blessing of health, would have done likewise, induced Ella to draw, in the secret recesses of her breast, a comparison between what Henry Masterton had done, and what Lord Eversleigh might possibly be capable of doing. The latter was, to all intents and purposes, a "masher." His "get-up" was simply perfection, and his all-round collar, and the fit of his rather over-tight garments, could well defy the assaults of criticism. He was strong of limb besides, and Ella had never heard that in his life-time he had been ill, and yet, for the life of her, she could not imagine the *soigné* figure of her aristocratic admirer dashed about by the whirling billows, and dragged, dripping and half unconscious, like any "common man," back to busy life again.

Neither Lady Hancock nor dear Sir John were slow to perceive the impression which Captain Masterton's heroism had made upon Ella, and both were, for different reasons, inwardly rejoiced at the idea that so it was. The "Sybil" was now well on her way towards Cuba, and as, during the past weeks, Miss Conynghame had in Lady Hancock's opinion been rather demonstrative as regarded her appreciation of the naval officer's merits, her ladyship took an opportunity of speaking to her husband on the subject.

"I really begin to think, Sir John," she said, "that we ought to give the Conynghames a hint of what is going on. The girl is falling in love as fast as she can with Masterton, and, as she is in our charge, it doesn't seem right to keep them in the dark."

"Not right! I like that," rejoined Sir John. "Why, what is the girl here for, but to put Eversleigh out of her head? One nail drives out another, don't you know. Besides, it is a brutal thing to spoil sport. Masterton is a very decent fellow, and if a young woman likes to do a little spooning on her own account, that is *her* look-out—not ours."

"But think how furious the Conynghames would be if anything came of it. I am quite sure that they still have an idea that Eversleigh will marry their daughter after all."

"Then the best thing for all hands is to put the notion out of their heads with as little delay as possible. Eversleigh is as weak as water, and Mrs. Conynghame is more than a match even for Montessor; but the girl, to my thinking, cares more for Masterton—rough fellow as he is—than she ever did for Eversleigh, so my advice is to let things slide. Of course there'll be a row, but you

can stand that, and I suspect that you, my dear Blanche, like many others, will not be sorry to see the Conynghame pride pulled down a peg."

And thus it was settled between this rather popular pair—a pair, too, who had won, in consequence of their kindness to poor Ella Conynghame, golden opinions from their "set," that the matter as regarded that young person's fresh love affair should be allowed, as far as they were concerned, to run its course smoothly. Meanwhile Mrs. Conynghame, who was the daughter of an impecunious Irish baron, adroitly gave her friends to understand that all would be right eventually between Lord Eversleigh and her daughter—the fact of Ella's forming one of the "Sybil" yachting party being one that did not admit of contradiction. "Man," so saith the proverb, "is fire, and woman tow," and if there be truth in the saying, it certainly seems only natural that when they come in contact a blaze should be the result. Now, contact in a small yacht is, especially when there exists a mutual attraction, difficult to avoid, and the result of *propinquity* became in the case of Ella Conynghame and the handsome sailing-master, before long apparent. On a lovely day, with just sufficient breeze to fill her sails, the yacht sailed into the Cuban harbour. The flagship of the Admiral in command of the West Indian Station happened to be, at the time, on a cruise to the Havana and Bermuda, and it was not long before several of the officers on board the "Boanerges" recognized and fraternized with the sailing-master of the "Sybil." One of the lieutenants, Lord Frederick Pierpoint by name, hailed him as an especial chum, and I regret to say that Ella was a good deal influenced as to her future bearing in regard to Masterton, by the estimation in which, by the said scion of nobility, he was evidently held. Her manner, especially when she could escape from the prying eyes of lookers-on, towards the man whom she had really begun to love, grew very encouragingly soft; so kind, indeed, was her behaviour, that he, being fully alive to her beauty, and *propinquity* having done its work, took courage one day soon after their arrival at the Havana, to ask her to be his wife. Fortunately or otherwise, for the success of his suit, his wooing was done in no humble form. He possessed a considerable amount of self-respect, and entertaining an idea that people were apt to be judged according to their own valuation of themselves, he was distinctly of the poet Burns' way of thinking, namely, that the—

"Rank being but the guinea's stamp,
The man was a man for a' that."

Such being his opinion, and he being painfully aware of his real inferiority in social status to the girl he courted, his pride openly took the alarm when she, after blushingly consenting to be his, begged that their engagement might for a time remain secret.

In her fear of losing him, for his blue eyes flashed with anger, and Ella was far from brave—she rashly proposed a compromise.

“I cannot face the scene on board,” she said, “were I to tell them that we are engaged. Lady Hancock is such a friend of mamma’s, and she would think it so very odd, but if you are really afraid, dear,” she added, with a roseate flush, and placing her hand caressingly on her lover’s shoulder, “that I shall play you false, we might perhaps be married secretly at the Consulate. Mr. Browning would never speak of it till after we are miles away, and then—oh then—you cannot doubt my love.”

This compromise having been arrived at, it was arranged that Ella should, under pretence of paying a visit to the Consul’s daughter with whom she had become intimate, drive in a hired “volante” to the Consulate, from which imposing structure she would return—*if all went well*—as the wedded wife of Henry Masterton. And all did—in so far as that result was effected—go well with the love-sick pair; but, alas! a merry little midshipmite, who, whilst dining on board the “Sybil,” had imbibed too many brandy cherries for his good, took it into his mischievous head to poke fun at his former messmate, Lieutenant Henry Masterton.

“I saw you, old chap,” he said, “coming out of old Browning’s office with Miss Conynghame. Some of our fellows got chaffing about it, and Goddard vows it was a wedding, but then every one knows that he’s a fool.”

Now, seeing that the officer with whose name the tipsy middy took such unseemly liberties was no other than the first lieutenant (then present) of the “Boanerges,” and that Ella’s blushes were confirmation strong of her imprudence, the *tableau* was—the reader may safely conclude—not wanting in effectiveness. There existed now no concealment possible of Ella’s suddenly resolved-on marriage, and the interview of the bride with her hostess which followed on the discovery, produced the almost immediate effect of awakening the girl to a sense of the folly of which she had been guilty. The veil of mystery once uplifted, she saw in all its naked deformity her social sin, and very much ashamed thereof did she feel. By no slow degrees moreover did her past illusions make to themselves wings, and when she heard from her husband’s own lips that he had risen from before the mast, and had by his own talents and good conduct arrived at his present position, the announcement not only utterly failed to raise him in her estimation, but added to the score of her griefs against the husband, who, in her “mad infatuation,” she had chosen. As regarded the unlucky struggles with the eighth letter of the alphabet to which she had once turned (when in company with her sailor-lover) a deaf ear, they were now as a torture to her auditory nerves, and if in the retirement of the conjugal cabin, he ventured to address her

as "old girl" the cup of her mortification and self-anger was full to overflowing.

The indignation of the Conynghame family when they discovered the trick, as they elected to call it, which had been played them, may be better imagined than described. Under pretence of giving Ella the benefit of a "sea change," the Montessor clique had, according to the Conynghame version of the story, inveigled the poor girl on board the "Sybil," and had there thrown her into the companionship of a man who could not claim even the merit of being "rich." "Strange," yet true, was the "change" which that sea-voyage had caused Ella to "suffer," but one of the most remarkable facts connected with the affair was this, namely,—that whilst dilating on the unprincipled doings of others, neither Ella nor her parents appropriated to themselves the slightest blame for the heavy calamity which they were never weary of deploring. Moreover (a fact which may, methinks, be taken for granted) Lieutenant Masterton's acknowledged good qualities, both as a brave man and a first-rate sailor, went no way in causing his new connections to condone the circumstance that he was beyond the pale of that fraternity, which in their opinion alone deserved the epithet of "Good Society."

“AS NIGHT FOLLOWS DAY.”

A STORY IN TWO PARTS,

By HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH,

AUTHOR OF “KILCORRAN,” “ROBIN ADAIR,” “DREAM FACES,” ETC.

“To thine own self be true,
And it shall follow, as the night the day,
Thou can’st not then be false to any man.”
Hamlet.

PART II.

IT was no secret to the world at large that Francis Erldon’s last great stake in life would be played out then for weal or woe. He had sold everything he could sell, he had raised money in every way he could raise it, and had backed his horse for every shilling he had in the world,—which, put plainly, meant: that he stood to win fifty thousand pounds if Culloden won the Two Thousand Guineas stakes at Newmarket in the first week of the coming month of May,—if he did *not* win, then irretrievable ruin and a life of exile must be Lord Francis Erldon’s portion.

Therefore, now did the woman who loved him watch with a keen anxiety that almost amounted to pain when the horse on whom so much depended was commanded to parade past her, and it was with more of a sob than a smile that she exclaimed breathlessly: “I see no fault in him, do you?”

Truly Culloden deserved the flattery well, for from his beautiful game little head to his well-bred, silky tail, no weak point in his make or shape could be discerned, and he looked what he was, a grand specimen of an English thoroughbred horse.

Whole bay, without a speck of white; shoulders of the best to bring him down hill, powerful quarters to drive him uphill; true, easy action, to which all sorts of courses would come alike, and legs and feet that would have done justice to an iron-limbed American mustang,—it was indeed impossible to find any fault in so faultless a horse. And yet, the experienced old trainer sighed involuntarily as he noted the restless manner in which the colt stared about him, and to himself he murmured: “Those *too* beautiful heads often mean temper!”

The orders were given for Culloden, with another colt to keep him company and led by old Dancing Master, to gallop a mile at half speed,—starting from the spot where they were now standing, and going in a semicircle. But though the other two horses jumped off at once on the signal being given, Culloden deliberately stuck his toes in the ground and stopped and kicked.

“I feared as much!” muttered old Barnes to himself, and then roared angrily to the others to come back,—as if the misdemeanors of the great horse ought to be laid to their charge.

Once again the word to start is given, and once more the two other horses jump off promptly; but again does Culloden whip round and commence a series of bucks and plunges that would unseat any less practised individual than the active lad who is riding him.

The trainer looks very grave, and Miss Harding equally uneasy.

“There’s no doubt he’s an awkward customer,” observed the former grimly, watching Culloden’s eccentric vagaries, which he continued to indulge in, in spite of his lad’s many efforts to get him back to the other horses, that stand staring in wondering amazement at their new companion’s strange freaks.

“I suppose when once he is off, he’ll go straight enough, Barnes?” questioned Miss Harding doubtfully.

“Yes, Miss Janet,—*when!*” returned the old trainer laconically.

As if to maintain his contradictory character, no sooner are the other two horses in line for a start once more than Culloden trots leisurely up to them and starts himself apparently, for Barnes has only time to give a quick shout of, “Let them go!” when all three horses go thundering by, in very open order indeed.

In spite, however, of such a straggling start, ere many lengths have been traversed the horses fall into their allotted places, and disappear rapidly beyond the bend of the hill; whilst Miss Harding and her companion canter quickly across to the point where the gallop is to come to an end, and in a few more moments the three horses are seen rising the crest of the hill, and coming towards them once more.

Dancing Master maintains the accustomed steady pace at which he has led so many novices in their work, for more years than he likes to remember,—and the other colt is doing his best not to drop into the rear, a place which evidently becomes him best. But Culloden comes striding along at his ease, fighting hard to get his head and to redouble the pace at which they have been ordered to proceed. And when the old trainer holds up his arm and beckons to them with his whip to “come on!” the colt leaves the two other horses without an effort, and passes the lookers-on at a pace which, even to the experienced eyes of so astute a man as Mr. Barnes, seems little short of marvellous.

Miss Harding laughed aloud in her glee. "Surely there's no horse in all England like him?" she asked enthusiastically. And though old Barnes vouchsafed no reply, the smile on his bluff red face spoke volumes, and he patted his new charge on the shoulder in deep contentment as the latter was led away.

After that day, scarcely once did Janet miss seeing Culloden do his morning's work, and many an anxious moment did he cost her, in thinking of all that lay at stake at the mercy of his capricious temper. Then a day came when she was told the long expected news, that Lord Francis himself was coming to see his colt at work; and so for two mornings neither the pretty grey hack nor its rider made their appearance on the Langwold Downs. But when they reappeared on the scene of action, Janet ascertained that her scrupulous care to avoid what might have been a painful meeting to both had been altogether needless, for Lord Francis never arrived at all, having been telegraphed for to go to the south of France, where his mother lay seriously ill of typhoid fever.

But this event was evidently of minor consideration in the old trainer's eyes, compared to the growing eccentricities of Culloden; and poor Barnes looked harassed to death as he detailed all the anxiety which that handsome equine sinner had caused him.

Certainly the colt's temper was growing daily more and more uncertain. At times he would start on a gallop as kindly as possible, and then all went well, for the horse was no cur, and once he would start on his work, no fault could be found with the style in which he did it. But far oftener it was impossible to get him off at all, and vainly was poor old Dancing Master brought back again and again in hopes of coaxing his fractious young stable-companion to move; a sudden whip round and a vicious lash out was the only notice which he received from the latter.

Even two or three cuts from Mr. Barnes' stout hunting-crop failed to elicit anything more than a few wild plunges, always in the reverse direction,—and the colt "took as much out of himself in half-an-hour, as twenty hours' galloping couldn't do, Miss Janet," poor Barnes observed aggrievedly.

However, by dint of much humouring of the horse, and almost superhuman patience on the part of the trainer, the last few days before the all eventful one saw Culloden do some real good work; and his extraordinary soundness of limb and hardiness of constitution enabled old Barnes to give him such gallops as fairly astounded all lookers-on, both secret and open,—and the newspapers teemed with favourable reports, whilst lavish praise was heaped upon the favourite on all sides, from high and low.

So all looked *couleur de rose* at last, and it was with a light heart that Janet took leave of both Culloden and his trainer a day or two afterwards,—only to meet again, though, later on. For

she was bent on a fortnight's visit to a relative residing on the borders of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire,—and amongst her promised pleasures there, a visit to Newmarket races stood first and foremost.

And so the days glided on, until the great event, on which so many thoughts, so many hopes and fears, were concentrated, drew near at last.

* * * * *

Bright and sunny is the weather that ushers in "the merry month o' May," and though it is but the first week of that capricious month, the sun's rays stream down hot and strong on the emerald turf of the famous Rowley Mile at Newmarket, whereon, in one short half-hour's time, will be fought out the first of the three great "classic" races of the year, the time-honoured Two Thousand Guineas' Stakes.

Though at first sight a stranger might draw unfavourable comparisons between the small attendance of lookers-on visible here, as compared to the masses which crowd the course and "hill" at Epsom, or the stolid array of keen north-countrymen who come yearly to give their opinion on the third and last of those same "classic" events, at Doncaster,—not a single well-known face amongst the ranks of that marvellous compound of highest and lowest known as "the racing division" is here missing.

Though there is a singular absence of the feminine sex in the scattered crowd at the ropes, and outside the "Birdcage," there is no lack of beautiful women's faces and neat tailor-made toilettes to be seen in the aristocratic Rowley Mile Stand; for many of England's fairest daughters rival her sons in their thorough appreciation of a good horse, and in their present keen excitement with regard to the merits of each competitor in the earliest three-year-old contest of the season.

There is but one name on every lip, uttered by turns in every accent of triumph, despair, hope or fear, and that is Culloden. Winner of the Middle Park Plate six months previously, Lord Francis Erldon's colt, Culloden, has been firmly established first favourite for the "Two Thousand" ever since he carried his owner's black and red colours to victory on that misty October day, when he cantered home at his ease from all the smartest two-year-olds of the year as if they were common hacks, leaving behind him a glorious promise of even greater things to come in the not far distant future.

No "idol of the hour" can lay claim to greater adulation than is offered to the "favourite" for a great race on English soil, when owner, trainer, and the animal itself, are one and all deservedly popular. So now a crowd of admirers are thronging about Culloden, as he parades round and round the saddling inclosure known to fame as the "Birdcage;" and even the vicious lash

out of his iron heels from time to time fails to shake off their too flattering attentions. For, whereas Culloden inherits his marvellous speed from the great Stockwell blood running in his veins, unfortunately the even temper and kindly disposition which are usually so sure a portion of the descendants of that grand sire, are in his case sadly wanting; and it needs only a glance at the equine hero of the hour to perceive at once that a more fractious and irritable horse it were difficult to find—whilst ominous comments upon his well-known disposition to show temper begin to make themselves heard on all sides.

Perhaps the least anxious face in the whole race-stand is that of Lord Francis Erldon himself, merely because, like all inveterate gamblers, he is sanguine to a fault, and the thought of defeat has no place at all in his mind. Accidents and other causes have removed every formidable rival from out of his colt's path, and Culloden has the race absolutely at his mercy. So Francis Erldon pauses on his way across the gravel lawn in front of the stand, and turns an attentive ear for a moment towards the iron rails of Tattersall's Ring with a well-pleased smile, as the incessant roar of, "5 to 4, Culloden," tells him that his horse is steadier than ever in his position of popular favourite for the coming race.

As he resumes his way towards the entrance gate leading out of the inclosure, a lady in a riding-habit comes slowly up the steps, and in another moment he is once more face to face with Janet Harding. For an instant neither speaks a word; then the quicker self-possession of a woman comes to the girl's rescue, and, before either of them can quite realize how it has come about, they are sauntering across the lawn in amicable converse, and Miss Harding is inquiring after his mother's health and the particulars of that lady's late illness in quite her own natural clear low voice, though secretly her heart beats nigh to suffocation.

They stand apart from the crowd for a minute or two, talking quietly, then a sudden impulse comes over Francis Erldon (born may be of the constant shouts: "5 to 4, Culloden," which still continue like unto the roaring of the sea).

"Miss Harding," he says quietly, though involuntarily he draws himself up and looks a shade taller as he speaks, "when last we met I stood before you under the disadvantage of being a thoroughly disappointed man, and what was worse, a thoroughly misunderstood one. I only told you the truth when I said: that *before* we met, your great fortune alone was my attraction. I don't regret having said so, Janet, for somehow I *couldn't* tell you a lie, dear—though I foresaw what speaking the truth would cost me! But in *one* thing at least you were utterly wrong."

Janet Harding says no word. God knows how bitterly she too regrets not having given him a chance of righting that wrong ere it was too late!

“Now things have altered for me,” goes on Lord Francis steadily, the wild shouts of his own horse’s name ringing in his ears triumphantly as he speaks. “To-day will see me a rich man once more, with all my difficulties solved and my debts paid, through the truest friend a man can have, and that is a good horse” (Janet winces involuntarily), “for only a miracle could prevent my winning this race, and that means my salvation! Therefore, I dare to tell you now, what I swore once to myself you should never know: that I love you as a man loves but one woman in a life-time; perhaps you will believe me *now*, when you know that your fortune can be absolutely nothing to me an hour hence!”

The pale quiet girl beside him stands motionless. It is *his* hour of triumph now, and she has no word to say. Only all the loyal love in her heart breaks forth in the fervently uttered words: “May you have all you hope for, now and always,” and she turns away a small sad resolute face, that he may not see how suddenly white it has grown.

But Lord Francis Erldon is standing there like one transfixed, and a strange numb feeling is creeping over him as if an unexpected blow had been dealt him straight between the eyes with sickening force, and yet that blow lies in words alone, for a great shout has gone up from the ring: “Four to one against Culloden!”

“What is it?” asks Janet anxiously, as she notes the set, grey look on his face.

“Something wrong with the horse, I suppose,” he answers quietly, and no one could have told from his manner that that “something wrong” meant utter ruin to him.

With a courteous lift of the hat, he turns and walks away towards the “Birdcage,” trying not to see the many glances cast in his direction as he elbows his way through the crowd, some triumphant, some sympathetic, but all curious.

“What’s up with my horse, Farley?” he asks of the first friend he sees. “I’ve been in the stand for the last few minutes and until I heard the change in the betting, never knew anything was wrong.”

“It will be all right yet, my dear fellow,” said young Farley reassuringly. “The fact is the horse has been showing such awful temper that he’s a perfect mass of foam and lather now, and about as fit to run a race as if he’d been dragged through a horse-pond. He’s a perfect *devil*!” wound up his aggrieved backer in disgust.

“Is that all?” exclaims Lord Francis in a tone of relief. “Why, the brute’s got such a lot in hand it wouldn’t matter if he had run the whole race already!” and he laughs gaily.

“I don’t know,” replies Ned Farley dubiously. “Come and see for yourself. Barnes has taken him out of the ‘Birdcage,’ and is

going to saddle him out there beyond the ropes, where it's quieter."

Together the two friends cross the course and approach the spot where the favourite is to be seen standing, surrounded still by an anxious crowd.

Truly Culloden looked to be beside himself with fear and rage. He was trying to break away every instant from the two strong lads who were hanging on to him at each side, whilst it was all Barnes could do with a constant, anxious entreaty of: "Take care, gentlemen, mind his heels!" to save a bad accident, as the crowd pressed on the horse, and the latter lashed out viciously on every side. His reeking neck and flanks showed only too plainly how much the colt had already taken out of himself by his fractious irritability, and it was no wonder that even his strongest partisans muttered: "Any good selling-plater might beat him now!"

But suddenly a change came over affairs. For some reason known only to himself, Culloden ceased all at once to knock about and fret, and became the quiet sensible horse he could be when the devil had gone out of him. No longer did the crowd seem to affect him, no more did his active heels make all spectators fly for their lives, the colt seemed suddenly to have become transformed.

"He's all right now, my lord!" exclaims old Barnes ecstatically. "The race is as good as won!"

"But how is it? Does he often change about like that?" asks Lord Francis in surprise. He had only arrived from France the night before, and knew little of the strange freaks of temper which his horse had lately developed.

"Yes, my lord. When once his fit of temper is over, a kinder horse doesn't live. And he'll run as honest as the day, too, that he will, I'll warrant him!"

"We'll hope so," answers Francis Erldon, who in spite of his critical position, feels rather like a man in a dream as he sees his horse move quietly away to where, a mile below, the far-off shimmer of silk and satin jackets await the late-comer.

And more than one man there, as he watches the favourite's magnificent action whilst cantering down leisurely to the post, rues mournfully the hot haste he has been in to veer round and lay against Culloden; but Francis Erldon is conscious of one thought alone: a dogged satisfaction that he "has had his say out" whilst yet there was time, though he never once glances towards the corner where Janet is sitting.

The usual two or three false starts take place, then the white flag sweeps the ground, and they are off. Knowing how much the favourite has already taken out of himself, naturally more than one of his antagonists have received orders to "come along," and the race is run at a tremendous pace from end to end.

Then history repeats itself, as it will ever do till the world comes to an end! Because Culloden had beaten all competitors as a two-year-old, no one credited that some of those disgraced rivals might improve sufficiently e'en to sorely vex *him* another year, but so it is. The colt does his best, for in justice to him it must be owned that, when once started, no horse can run kinder or truer than Culloden,—but the merits of two at least of his opponents have been sorely underrated. Creeping inch by inch nearer on his right hand may be seen the white blaze face of a plain but true-shaped son of mighty Blair Athol; whilst close on his left hand, too close to be pleasant, steals along the beautiful daughter of Macaroni, who three weeks hence will be cheered to the echoes on Epsom Downs as she wins the Oaks in a canter.

Still Culloden seems going well within himself, and a dead silence comes over the Ring as the favourite appears to be breasting the hill like a lion, full of running. Another moment of breathless suspense,—a murmur of doubt,—and then a roar rings out from many thousand throats: "The favourite's in trouble!" "Culloden is beat!"

Vainly does Lord Francis Erldon's beautiful horse struggle gamely to the last, fighting out the contest inch by inch,—do what he will he cannot shake off the powerful stride of the great chestnut colt on his right. Macaroni's flying daughter has challenged him, held her own for a few strides, and then retired; but the son of the mighty "pale-faced chestnut" is made of sterner stuff than she. Both horses seem for a moment locked together, then the white face of Blair Athol's son forges to the front, another desperate struggle, another stride, and the chestnut colt wins the "Two Thousand" by half a length.

Cheer upon cheer breaks forth from the ring, in noisy greeting of the winner; but the downfall of the favourite is received in sorest silence by the occupants of the Rowley Mile stand,—scarcely a man in it but has lost on him heavily. Still, true to their instinct, the "swells" take their defeat calmly and even gaily, but calmest of all is the handsome high-bred face of Lord Francis Erldon. And as Culloden's ill-fated owner goes down to meet his beaten horse and speak a word of comfort to the crestfallen old trainer, more than one rough voice in the crowd exclaims: "He's a good plucked 'un, anyhow!"

"It was his temper did it!" almost sobs poor old Barnes. "He was beat before ever he ran the race, my lord!"

"Still, he made a good fight for it," replies Lord Francis quietly, and pats his horse kindly on the neck. Then he turns and walks away, a ruined man.

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Another week has passed by, the time is between ten and eleven p.m., and Janet Harding stands beside her dressing-table

in the luxuriously-furnished bedroom of a large house in Belgrave Square, ready dressed for a ball, and occupied in a manner usual to even the most sensible young ladies under those circumstances, that is, looking at herself in the glass.

She had come up to town for this especial festivity, given by a relative of her own, in whose house she is now staying ; and the feverish anxiety she has displayed with regard to her toilette on this occasion is so unusual, that the said relative, an intelligent woman of the world, has drawn certain conclusions of her own therefrom, especially as Miss Harding has asked permission, frankly, to send a card of invitation to a friend of hers, and has openly stated, moreover, that the friend so honoured is Lord Francis Erldon.

“ But, my dear Janet,” remonstrated Lady Maberley to her young cousin, “ I suppose you know that Francis Erldon has come to utter grief at last ? I hear he’s absolutely *ruined*, my dear,—must leave England, and all that sort of thing ! ”

“ Yes, I know,” replied Miss Harding calmly. “ That is just why I wish to see him, to bid him good-bye.”

Lady Maberley looks doubtful. Perhaps she knows by experience the fatal effects of “last adieux,” and she cannot approve of a ruined “detrimental” hovering round her charming and wealthy young cousin, for whom she has already more than one brilliant match in view.

“ Well, my dear, invite Lord Francis if you wish to do so,” she says at length. “ Of course I shall be delighted to see him ; in fact only this very afternoon Colonel Pendennis was singing his praises loudly, and saying how honourably he had paid up every farthing he lost last week by that dreadful racing ! ‘ Francis Erldon may have his faults,’ I remember the colonel said, ‘ but I’m very sorry he’s gone. We could better spare a better man.’ So as he *is* going, Janet, by all means beg him to come to my ball, dear ! ”

And Miss Harding, with an unexplained feeling of remarkable kindness towards the oracular Colonel Pendennis, sits down at once and pens a note to Lord Francis Erldon, Turf Club, Piccadilly, in which she proffers him Lady Maberley’s invitation, and then adds on her own account the single sentence : “ Please let me speak to you before you leave England.”

The answer to Miss Harding’s epistle arrives on the very day of the ball itself, and is handed to her whilst assisting her cousin in distributing five o’clock tea to a large party of mutual friends and relations. Janet is a very self-possessed young lady, so she takes her note and then continues her duties with the bread and butter, with a calm indifference worthy of Werter’s famous Charlotte.

During an available moment she opens the letter, and peruses its somewhat laconic contents :

"DEAR MISS HARDING,

"Pray thank Lady Maberley for her kind invitation, which I am most happy to accept, especially as it offers the only possible chance of my being able to fulfil the further request mentioned in your note. I leave England to-morrow night.

"Always yours sincerely,

"FRANCIS C. ERLDON."

This is why Janet Harding stands before the mirror, and anxiously consults that ever true and unflattering counsellor, whether or no she "is looking well to-night?" Whatever crisis in life may be staring a woman in the face, she is no true woman if she does not derive consolation and fortitude from the thought that at least she is looking her best at the critical moment!

The mirror tells an unvarnished tale, but all the same it gives back a radiant picture. Miss Harding's dress is nothing extraordinary,—merely a fresh white ball-dress, fitting admirably; but the diamonds that hang on her neck and arms, and cluster in her red-brown hair, these are indeed extraordinary, each glittering dew-drop worth a king's ransom.

Purposely has Janet selected the most magnificent jewels in her possession to wear to-night, though usually she is in no way given to displaying her far-famed diamonds over much, holding it to be bad taste for an unmarried girl to bedeck herself too freely with precious stones.

But, for a certain reason of her own, carefully considered and well thought out, Janet Harding wishes all the world to-night to realize that she is no ignorant chit, of little value in the great game of life, but with a stake of considerable magnitude therein, which moreover she intends to play with a firm will and an uncontrolled hand.

And yet, now that she is ready dressed for the fray, now that the moment has come when she needs all her courage, the girl's heart sinks within her, and she murmurs irresolutely: "*Dare* I do it after all? Will he forgive the past, or will he not?"

Unconsciously she opens a book lying on the table before her, and glances down the pages in it at random. Almost as an answer to her thoughts she reads these words from the wisdom of the son of Sirach: "Though thou drawest a sword at a friend, yet despair not, for there may be a returning to favour. If thou hast opened thy mouth against a friend, fear not, for there may be a reconciliation; except, for upbraiding, or pride, or disclosing of secrets, or a treacherous wound, for, for these things every friend will depart."

"Pride! 'for pride, every friend will depart,'" repeats Janet to herself sadly. "Ay! but if that pride should humble itself, even to the dust, what then?" And Miss Harding closes the

book and walks to the door with a firm step, the light of a clear resolution in her beautiful honest eyes.

The ball has already begun, for so long has Janet dawdled over her toilette that the first three dances are concluded by the time she makes her way through a crowd of silk and satin, lace and tulle, and arrives at the ball-room door in safety.

The first person she encounters on its threshold is Mrs. Fairfax, *not* “looking her best,” for several things have conspired to put that fair lady out of tune to-night, and the sight of another woman’s diamonds is always as a red rag to a bull in her case.

“I am so surprised to see Francis Erldon here to-night,” she observes spitefully, after the usual formalities of greeting have taken place.

“Yes?” replies Miss Harding, and her calmly courteous tone has an exasperating effect on the fair Laura.

“Perhaps you don’t know that he’s a ruined man! It would show that he felt his position more if he did not waste his last few hours in England dancing the *trois-temps*, I think!” observes Mrs. Fairfax with a virtuous sniff.

“Is *that* all the sympathy you have to spare for one whom you once called ‘friend’?” asks Janet coldly and contemptuously.

Mrs. Fairfax’s eyes fall before the indignant glance in those clear grey ones confronting her,—then she laughs nervously, and says with meaning:

“Perhaps I am not the *only* friend that has failed Lord Francis Erldon ere now!”

The stab goes home, as it was meant to do. Of a truth, had the great heiress said him “yea” instead of “nay,” how different all might now have been! As Mrs. Fairfax passes on her way, Janet still stands in the same place, musing deeply,—and starts when a well-known voice says quietly:

“May I have this valse, Miss Harding, if you are not engaged? It’s called the ‘Fahrwohl,’ so is singularly appropriate to the occasion,” and Lord Francis Erldon laughs pleasantly at his own bitter jest.

Janet bows her head in acquiescence but makes no reply.

After only one turn, feeling that her courage is rapidly dwindling, Miss Harding says desperately:

“I don’t *want* to dance, Lord Francis. Please may we go and sit down?”

“By all means. I don’t feel much in a dancing humour, either! And you wanted to speak to me, did you not, Miss Harding?”

“Not here,” says Janet hurriedly. “Across the staircase is my cousin’s boudoir, that room is fairly quiet at least.”

“Very well, you must guide me, for I don’t know the intricacies of this mansion.”

Francis Erldon spoke as lightly as if no dark shadow were hanging over his life, as if no last farewell to the only great love he had ever felt were ruthlessly staring him in the face.

Without a word they both take their seats on Lady Maberley's own particular sofa, the luxurious comfort of which they are scarcely in a humour to appreciate, it is to be feared.

From across the corridor, the music of the Hungarian band steals softly into the room, the weird and melancholy sweetness of that matchless “*Fahrwohl*” valse seeming to possess a strange significance.

As one of the most charming writers of the day has said: “There is an indescribable underlying pathos in dance music,—everybody knows it; a heartache behind all the laughter, a weariness below all the rapid movement,—a question, a doubt, a misgiving, under all the radiance and joy.”

Perhaps it was this feeling which caused a long unbroken silence to fall upon the pair now listening to the music's far-off strains; but at last Francis Erldon turns towards his companion and says quietly:

“What was it you had to say to me, Janet? Forgive me for calling you by that name, but probably it is the last time on earth I shall ever so err, for it will be a long time ere I see old England again, and who knows what those years may bring forth?”

Miss Harding either will not, or cannot, answer. Her face is turned away, and he cannot see the unshed tears in her sad grey eyes, nor can he note the piteous conflict of feeling visible on her face.

“I know you have little faith in me, Janet, but even now, when it has come to the last words between us, I do not regret that I told you the truth all through.”

His companion makes a desperate effort to reply, but an inarticulate murmur is the only result,—the words *will* not come!

“You were so true and honest yourself, dear, that some power stronger than my own constrained me to be the same, somehow, and I never thought you would not believe me! *That* hurt worst of all, I think.”

A sudden and uncontrollable sob from poor Janet falls like a thunder-clap on his ears.

“My dear child, for God's sake don't cry!” he exclaims anxiously. “It was no fault of yours, dear, and I'm ten times happier now that at least we part friends. We *do* do that, I think, don't we? Tell me,—what was it you wished to say to me, Janet?”

There is an instant's silence, during which a proud woman's soul is fighting out a desperate fight,—then Janet Harding's voice rings out clear and true:

“Will you marry me, Lord Francis, *now*?”

Petrified astonishment causes Francis Erldon to keep silence

for quite half a minute. Can she mean it? Is it possible that she would marry him now, when absolute ruin is his portion? If she doubted his honesty of purpose before, how much more might she not doubt it now? No, it could be nothing but a girl's sentimental sympathy for a man to whom Fate has dealt a hard blow.

"My dear," he says gravely and quietly, but the tremor in his voice shows how deeply he is moved, "I shall respect and honour you to my dying day for your brave, true womanliness, for I can realize what it cost you to say those words. But, my darling, I love you too well to accept what you offer me, for I know that it is prompted by sweet compassion alone, and I will not take that! My own, forgive me,—though I feel as reckless as only a ruined man can feel, I have not sunk so low as to be a suitor for your charity, sweet and kindly though it be."

"But, Lord Francis, it is *not* charity, or compassion either,"—here Miss Harding's cheeks blush for her, but she goes on bravely: "it was all a mistake. Don't you see that it was not *I* who did not—not 'care' for you? it was *you* that I believed did not care for *me*!" The low voice trembles enough, but the clear true eyes look him so frankly and confidingly in the face, that Francis Erldon cannot choose but believe her.

"My darling!" is all he says, but his voice has so changed its tone that Miss Harding finds courage to lay one small hand on the arm nearest her, and to observe pathetically:

"You're not going to *refuse* me, Lord Francis, are you?"

Half-an-hour passes by with a rapidity unprecedented in both their lives,—then a tardy sense of duty recalls them once more to the ball-room.

"You're making a very bad match, Janet," observes Francis Erldon sadly, looking at the radiant, diamond-crowned vision standing before him. "So far as worldly possessions go, I'm not even worth as much as one of those magnificent diamond stars in your pretty hair. And as regards myself——"

"You are worth all the world to me," is the quiet, confident response of the woman who has chosen him, and him alone, from out all others on the face of this earth.

At the entrance to the ball-room they have to stand aside a minute, to make way for a party who are just leaving it; amongst the latter is Mrs. Fairfax.

"Good-bye, Lord Francis," she gushes forth sweetly. "So sorry we shall not meet again. May I wish you better luck in another hemisphere,—in *every* way?" she adds spitefully.

"It would scarcely prove better luck than has come to me in this one, Mrs. Fairfax!" laughs Francis Erldon gaily.

Something in his voice arouses the fair Laura's interested curiosity, and she looks attentively at the pair before her, scrutinizing their faces with a keen and searching look.

What she reads there scarcely seems to please her. Her thin

lips grow strangely compressed, and her eyes take a look as cold and hard as a nether mill-stone, but for all remark, she turns to the feeble young man who is escorting her, and in a voice, the suppressed fury of which makes him shake in his dancing shoes, says:

“Is that carriage *never* coming, Mr. Cony?”

“Now we’ll finish our valse, Janet!” observes her future husband jestingly. “They’ve changed the tune since we were last here, but I consider this one even more appropriate still.”

“I know it well enough, but can’t remember the name?”

“‘Mia Cara’,” whispers Lord Francis in her ear, with unmistakable earnestness of explanation.

“Oh! Francis,” the name comes forth with a shy grace, “there is one more favour I have to ask of you, a *very* great one.”

“Greater even than the last?” inquires Lord Francis mischievously.

“May I—may *we*,” the last pronoun is accompanied by a vivid happy blush, “buy back Culloden from old Barnes? may we?”

“Of course. You shall have him for a park hack if you fancy it, child. But, Janet, seriously speaking, my gambling days are over once for all. I did not care what became of *myself*, but now, life is going to be a different thing altogether!”

“I’m very glad,” answers Janet Harding in her clear truthful tones.

“All the same, the horse shall come back to us, dear one, and have a good time for ever and aye,—for perhaps we ourselves even do not know how powerful an arbiter of our destiny was that ill-fated Culloden!”

THE END.

THE HUMOURS OF SHOW SUNDAY.

A MOST able article was written in the *Daily Telegraph* on the above institution, and it was fairly exhaustive. Much, as in most cases, can be said pro and con., and I do not propose to enter into any argument on the subject, but merely to delineate as best I can a few of the typical visitors who on the Sunday and Monday throng studios, and cause the unhappy artist to curse the day he was born and not to speak too respectfully of his departed parents. First and foremost, the clergy are trying. Those who have had a good deal to do with them are aware that they are by no means shy in expressing their opinions with more or less verbosity, and if very ignorant, generally cover their ignorance in the manner of the cuttle fish, with a cloud of words or verbal ink—never diffident in asking subscriptions for the most absurd objects, the local pump, the mothers' meeting, the schoolroom, &c. I was so pestered at one time that I declined complying with this blackmail, on the ground that I never gave except to my own ill-endowed sect, and being asked what it was, ever replied, "The Primitive Jumpers." I received on one occasion a beautifully-written letter from Minerva House, Hammersmith, principal, Miss Robinson Brown Smith, requesting the favour of being allowed to inspect my works of art with one or two of her most advanced pupils. I assented. The lady appeared and brought seventeen of all shapes and sizes, all with a chronic giggle, and when not stuffing their handkerchiefs in their mouths, carefully chewing the corners. Look at the works of art they did not, but sniggered at the lay figures and made decidedly and audibly impertinent remarks on my personal appearance. I have not received the lady again.

Sometimes three or four painfully accurately-dressed young men would come in with a friend's card, look at the pictures, and go away without comment, saying by way of adieu, "Thanks awfully, yaas."

One highly-acidulated miss, who looked like a sample of virgin vinegar, asked who painted my pictures. I told her I was the artist. The lady said with a snort, "WHAT, YOU!" and then left. What she meant I never knew or shall know.

On another occasion, the man who opened the door came up with a card, which I did not look at. He said it had been presented by some ladies, and there was a twinkle in his eye. I said,

"Show them up, as per usual," and up they came; seven as uncomely women as ever I saw; in figure of the milestone pattern (same size all the way up). They filed in and made seven stately bows seriatim, and stood in a row for five minutes, turned round, made seven even statelier bows, and then filed out again, and never uttered a word. One was irresistibly reminded of the procession of the visionary kings in "Macbeth." I could only say, "Is nightmares abroad?" in the phraseology of Bret Harte. And now to come to a very sad episode. A tall, portly, very stout man, of clerical appearance, and with a closely-shaven face, sent up a card, the Reverend Something or other, of "somewhere." On his coming in he was frightfully effusive, and talked on every subject, including Shakespeare and the musical glasses, and informed me that he was a Broad Churchman. Physically he was. His information was singularly superficial, such as a retentive memory and a careful perusal of the *Athenæum* and the *Saturday Review* could easily get up, and was principally the baldest twaddle. Getting bored, I invited him in to have some tea, and left him to its enjoyment in the ante-room. Fresh visitors arriving, I never saw him more, as he let himself out by the ante-room door, nor did I ever see six tea-spoons, sugar tongs, and a brand new silk umbrella. The card was a sham one, and my only consolation was that with the exception of one spoon, the remainder were electro, with my initials on them, which were engraved to prevent confusion with my co-tenant's property. The horny-handed sons of toil are great. My carpenter, a most worthy and frightfully deaf man, asked leave to bring some of his mates. Four in all arrived, admirably clean, in frock coats and pot hats. They were judicious in their criticisms and wonderfully nicely-behaved, but all of a sudden an irrepressible little cock-sparrow of a man burst in with, "Ah! mates, it would do the gentleman good to see some of Bill Parker's drorings. You see, sir, this is 'ow it is. Bill's a gasfitter, self-tort, and he ain't married, which more's the pity;" then addressing the deaf party, he propounded the notion that Bill, being steady and clever, ought to get "'itched," as he phrased it. The deaf party, who is very much married, and has a shrewish wife and eight children, scouted the idea, and informed the little man that he (Bill) had better let well alone, and not make a blanked "hidjet" of himself. "All I've got to say is, I wish to Gawd as I was single again." The Irrepressible said, "Well, you know, sir, Bill's trade is like yourn, it is skilled labour; it ain't nothing but skilled labour as can make a proper jint in a pipe. People don't know what the man can do; and tho' I am only a hard-working, 'orny 'anded cove, all I can say is that it's pritty to see 'im make a union." A slightly mixed and rather irascible dialogue took place when I propounded beer as a pastime. Every gentleman said, "'Ere's towards you, sir," and then they took their leaves.

The most awful bores and the worst behaved are the Topham

Sawyers (Thackeray), husband and wife. Mrs. T. S., tall, bony, over-dressed, with huge glowing skirts, scented to death, and remarkable for a cold glassy eye and a Roman nose—*fortement accusé*—and powder on its bridge. I defy any mortal man to look at Mrs. T. S. without his eyes wandering to her nose. She generally brings her daughters with her, who are of any age varying from twenty to twenty-six and are four pasty-faced girls with the maternal nose developing fast. Mrs. T. S. keeps up a kind of polite fiction that they are but children, and exhorts them not to stoop and to notice all they see. Looking in the mirrors, after one of these exhortations, I saw the youngest protrude her tongue behind her mother's back for the benefit of her sisters. This particular Mrs. T. S. called when I had a friend with me who showed my pictures off whilst I sat still, having a rheumatic affection of the knee at the time rendering it very painful for me to stand. My friend with the gravest face is a wild joker, and on Mrs. T. S. suggesting that I was suffering from gout from some Bohemian games told her it was caused by attending a midnight meeting on Good Friday and kneeling on cold stones. She looked him over but never a muscle moved he. She then said, "You gentlemen indulge, I recognize, in the filthy habit of smoking; are you not aware that it is most deleterious?" My friend replied that his grandfather smoked up to ninety-three and was then choked by a haddock bone. Again a searching glance, and again a face as expressive as a brick wall. Prowling round the room and going where she had not the slightest occasion or business to go, the tail of her dress caught in a large new portrait frame, pulled it over, the jar of the fall dislocated the joints, the glass was broken, and £2 10s. was what I had to pay for getting the damage repaired. She expressed no word of sorrow, but considered it was a stupid place to put a frame in. I suggested that people usually did not go prowling about studios and getting into corners. On this remark Mrs. T. S. became decidedly abusive and said if that was the way I treated my guests she for one would never come again. I suggested that I never saw her before that day and she merely came with a friend's card, on which she gathered her brood together and sallied forth, two of her children making faces at myself and friend behind their mother's back. My friend threw himself on the floor in a convulsion of assumed grief and uttered several piercing yells, spilling an imperial pint of turpentine on the floor to get rid of the horrid smell of scent. Mr. T. S. is generally a big man, very heavy and dull, and certainly would require his brains taking out and washing before they could receive any fresh ideas. Mr. T. S. is a worthy man, but awfully dense, and has never got beyond the impressions of twenty-one, and his notions of art are the tenets of the Benjamin West school. He comes and utters no comment, the sniff dubious in his expression of opinion. Suddenly he says, "Do you know the works of

Buggins, R. A. ?” I mildly rejoin, “Slightly ; was he not a follower of Benjamin West ?” This brings down a torrent of, “Young sir, Buggins, R. A., was a painter, one of the great school, dignified by such geniuses as Fuseli, the Rev. Peters and Angelica Kaufman” (whom he will call Korfman). “Why, sir, do you know I am the proud possessor of his sketch of Kent having his eyes plucked out ? you will find the subject in Shakespeare’s ‘King Lear,’ and nobly he has treated it. I shall be glad to show it to you—it is now at my house, The Spasms, Enfield—any time you like to call ; but mind you, young sir, Buggins, R. A., *was* a painter.” I say it with shame that I have never yet found time to go to Enfield and inspect the works of the immortal Buggins, R. A.

Another frequenter of studios on this awful day was a gentleman who had a pleasing habit of being very obtuse, and if you told him the subject of a picture five minutes after would say, “And what shall we call this little thing, aye ! aye ! aye ! the name for this is—— ?” When I painted my justly-celebrated picture of a dead Christian being lowered into the Catacombs, he covered me with confusion by asking if they were not taking in fresh provisions on board ship. A very audible smile crept over my visitors’ faces and the sale of the picture was ruined.

The length of this article precludes my writing *in extenso* upon the parties who see no merit in your pictures but admire your frames, the party who picks out of a large and painfully elaborate historical picture some trifling detail as a pot or basket in a corner, and the gay and festive and decidedly common or garden donkey who asks if you don’t paint from lay figures and get your expression off them, and are they not much better than human models ?

I now pass to my last paragraph—the history of a triptych :

Enter unto me a long, lean, sallow, semi-clerically dressed man, slow in speech, deliberate in utterance. He also came on a Show Sunday and took up his parable to this effect : “I, sir, am greatly interested in the Church of St. Ethelburga Swyfeleye, and it is my wish to present it with a triptych. I should be glad to know if you would undertake to paint one. Six feet by nine in the centre, and the two side wings to be respectively three feet each. I should wish it painted with gold backgrounds diapered, and in the style of the late lamented ——.” I said I did not paint in that style, that I did not care to paint either chlorotic women or epicene creatures that did duty for men, and that the type that called for a mop of tangled hair, a huge eye, a projecting chin, and a generally unwholesome complexion, was not for the likes of me. I also objected to the gilt work at the back of the Redeemer, but as regards the two other figures I would try and follow out his wishes. Then said my friend, “I fear you artists are rather obstinate and will have your own ways.”

“And now,” said I, “we come to a very vital point, the question of remuneration. This picture would be no child’s play and would

certainly make a hole in nine months; you will remember there are models to pay daily, three huge oak panels, gilding, carpenters' work, gilt mouldings round and cartoons. It certainly would take nine months out and away." To which the patron of art replied, "Every reasonable expense and money out of pocket of course I would repay, and will sign an agreement of a binding kind which a solicitor could draw up." "But, my good sir," said I, "how about my remuneration for nine months' hard work and thought?" "Well," said my visitor in reply, "I thought I had explained to you that I was going to present it to St. Ethelburga." My blood was fairly up. "What!" I said, "you take nine months of hard manual and mental labour, give me nothing for it, and get up a spurious character for generosity for giving away what you have filched from me. The subject admits of no discussion. Smith, show this person out."

E. HESS-KAYE.

A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY DE FOCHSEY CHOOSES BETWEEN HER WORLDLY AND
SPIRITUAL LOVERS.

LORD LITTELBRANE had come there that day charged with a desperate purpose, and bent on fulfilling a design which he had only formed after long self-communing and inward cogitation. The presence of Mr. Jarrett—the pose in which he had discovered him—had shaken his intention, but not wholly destroyed it. An explanation had, however, been forthcoming, which he considered satisfactory. The lady was to be pitied, not blamed, as in his haste he had imagined. A dear, pretty, little good-natured thing, who required some one stronger than herself to guide and direct her through the shoals of life. A woman who was sweet and guileless as an infant, a very child in nature, and whose faults proceeded entirely from too kindly and unworldly a disposition.

This was how he summed her up, after half an hour's conversation and after some fifty or sixty eye-glances, lip-pouts, shoulder-shrugs, and hand-touches. It takes quite an ordinary Delilah to defeat a Samson, and Lord Littelbrane was no pillar of strength. The very seclusion in which he had lived, his reluctance to mix freely with the sex, rendered him all the more credulous and unsuspecting. Taking a wife was very much the same as taking an awkward fence out hunting. He did not like the necessity. It put him in an awful fright; still, once it became patent that the thing must be done, it was wiser to go through with a good grace.

And now he found his courage rising. She was so very sweet and gracious—nay, almost caressing.

He cleared his throat, and, with a preparatory cough, said—

"Ahem! Lady De Fochsey, I wish to consult you on a delicate matter, but before doing so will you grant me a favour?"

"Why, most certainly," she answered, surprised by the solemnity of his manner.

"Thank you. I thought you would. Will you give me your views on matrimony?"

"On matrimony!" she echoed, fairly astonished at the demand.

"Yes, I should like to hear your ideas, if you have no objection to stating them."

"Do you mean my own personal experiences, Lord Littelbrane, or the opinions that I have formed in a general way?"

"I should like both, but the former for choice. What I want to arrive at is this: Do you, or do you not, approve of marriage, looking at it not emotionally, but merely as a philosopher?"

"What a peculiar question. Of course I hold with matrimony as an institution. Women would fare even worse than they do without it."

"Have you fully considered the responsibilities connected with the state?"

"To what responsibilities do you refer, my lord?"

"At the present moment, chiefly to those incurred by parents towards their offspring."

"Oh! I don't pretend to have any experience in such matters," she said lightly. "You see I was lucky enough to avoid bringing a tribe of children into the world."

"You never had any? Not even one?"

"No, never, I am thankful to say."

"Excuse me, Lady De Fochsey, but were you not disappointed at failing to perpetuate the family name?"

She burst out laughing. This cross-examination appeared to her so utterly absurd, and it had not yet dawned upon her what he was driving at.

"Really, Lord Littelbrane," she said, still striving to control her mirth, "I did not consider the family name of so much importance as all that, and it would have driven Sir Jonathan simply mad to have had a squalling baby in the house."

"Strange," he murmured, eyeing her critically from top to toe. "Any one would have said that you were formed by nature to be the mother of a healthy and numerous family."

She was not over and above pleased at the turn the conversation was taking. She told herself it was coarse—very coarse. As a charming woman she had no objection to being admired, but not as a peopler of the world.

"Does your ladyship enjoy good health?" he went on, not noticing her displeasure, and still pursuing his own train of reflections with a stolid perseverance that was one of the chief attributes of his character.

"Yes, very, thank goodness. I've never been ill in my life. But why this sudden interest?"

"Young, strong, handsome, and the owner of an admirable constitution," he exclaimed, as if speaking his thoughts aloud.

"Where can I find a more suitable mate, or one more likely to furnish me with an heir? Age, looks, temper—everything is right."

"Good gracious! Lord Littelbrane. What on earth are you talking about?"

"The time has come for an explanation, Lady De Fochsey." And as he spoke, he rose from his seat and began pacing restlessly up and down the room. "It is important that I should marry and obtain a successor, otherwise the family title and estates pass into unknown hands."

"What a misfortune," she exclaimed with an irrepressible touch of satire.

"Of all the ladies of my acquaintance," he went on boldly, warming to his subject at last, "you are the one whom I consider most fitted to assist in procuring the desired result. I am a plain-spoken man, and like coming to the point at once. My age is forty-six, and I have twelve thousand a year. Will you be Lady Littelbrane?"

So saying he stopped short, and looked hard at her ladyship with his small colourless eyes.

For the second time that day she experienced a genuine movement of surprise. Lord Littelbrane's proposal, however flattering it might be to her vanity, was totally unexpected. He had not paved the way for it in the least. Moreover, this brusque style of courtship did not recommend itself to her ideas. They—as we already know—were high-flown and romantic.

Besides, on this particular afternoon her soul was still steeped in the vague and exquisite rapture produced by the recent *séance*. Mystic influences intoxicated it. If he had appealed to the more lofty and spiritual side of her nature, he might have had a chance; but there was something revolting and grossly material in the notion of being invited to marry a man for the express purpose of furnishing him with a son and heir. Added to this, she had no natural love of children. The sight of a baby did not throw her into tender rhapsodies. On the contrary, the little ugly, puckered, red-faced things only inspired her with aversion. All the affection she had to spare was already concentrated upon her darling pugs. In short, Lord Littelbrane's proposal could not possibly have been couched in more infelicitous terms. The very words "children and parental responsibilities" made her shiver. And then, he was so abominably grave. His face would have reflected credit upon an undertaker, and won him golden opinions as a hired mourner at a funeral. She dearly loved a man with a little dash and "go" about him, even if he *did* require keeping in his place every now and again. During the whole time of Mr. Jarrett's visit she had never once felt dull. But, on the other hand, Lord Littelbrane was a wealthy nobleman, and occupied a fine position. If she married him she would be able to snub all those people who had shown her the cold shoulder during her widowhood. To do so would afford infinite satisfaction. No doubt he offered many advantages from a worldly point of view. Even spiritual exaltation could not entirely shut her eyes to that fact. And then she looked at him. Looked critically and dispassionately at his little, undersized figure;

his bloodless face, with its covering of wizened-up skin ; his sandy hair, and weak, watery eyes. He was very insignificant ; in fact, downright ugly. The sort of man she disliked. Nevertheless, one short hour ago she might have taken him, and put up with his personal appearance ; but at the present moment her whole being vibrated in response to the ecstatic conviction that she was deeply, desperately in love, and at last had fallen victim to the long-sought and vainly-courted passion of which she had read so much in novels, and seen so little in real life.

Already she felt like a heroine of romance. Bob's brown eyes and bright glances had penetrated her impressionable heart, and henceforth she told herself that she could never, never wed any but a medium in search of the eternal verities.

How rapturous and yet how lofty had been the sensations conjured up by that too brief *séance*. And now she was requested to sacrifice all these grand, heroic feelings—feelings which seemed to lift her into an altogether purer atmosphere—in order to bring a young Littelbrane into the world.

Faugh ! The vulgarity and the gross materialism of the proposition clashed with all her finer instincts, and even rendered her impervious to her own self-interest. The excitation of her mood was such that it repudiated the commonplace idea of getting married and having children. She rose from her seat, smoothed down the front of her dress (a habit of hers), and said :

“My lord, you do me great honour ; nevertheless I cannot become Lady Littelbrane.”

He was too utterly amazed to be offended. Such a reply had never entered into his calculations.

“Why not ? ” he asked incredulously. “Have you any reason for saying no ? ”

A mischievous smile played around the corners of her mouth.

“Because it is just possible I might disappoint your expectations.”

He looked at her, much as he would have looked at some thoroughbred mare.

“I am inclined to think not, Lady De Fochsey.”

“Well, whether I should or whether I shouldn't, I am afraid to run the risk.”

“There need be none as far as you are concerned.”

“What ! ” she exclaimed satirically. “Not when Napoleon the Great offers the honour of an alliance ? Pshaw ! my lord, I know what men are too well to believe you.”

He was rather flattered at being compared with so famous a man. He smiled.

“I do not think you quite realize what you are refusing,” he said with quiet confidence.

She made no immediate reply. Indeed, she began to think that, arrogant as they sounded, there might be some truth in his words.

She had got a little nearer earth again in the last few minutes, and the extreme assurance of his manner impressed her more than she cared to admit.

"Perhaps not. It is just possible you may be right there," she said uneasily.

"However," he continued, taking up his hat and stick, "I shall not look upon your decision as final. No doubt my proposal has come upon you as a surprise. Think it over. In a month's time I shall ask you again to be my wife, and expect then to receive a different answer."

And with this curious speech he departed, feeling very much more intent on gaining Lady De Fochsey's consent than when he had first entered the house.

Opposition lent a zest to the pursuit which had hitherto been wanting.

He was not in the least downcast, as many men similarly situated might have been. He possessed far too good an opinion of himself to believe for one moment that the lady of his choice was in earnest. His mind could not realize any woman refusing him seriously.

Being somewhat unprepared for so great an act of condescension on his part, it was quite natural that she should require a little time to get accustomed to it. This was how he construed her rejection of his suit.

As for himself—well—he did not profess to be a very ardent wooer. He was marrying from principle, and from principle alone. That was why, unlike the rest of mankind, he could look round calmly, and select a partner according to his theories of selection and maternal aptitude. But under these circumstances he was not in a hurry. He felt none of the passionate impetuosity of youth, and had no objection to wait until her ladyship had become thoroughly familiarized with the greatness and importance of her mission in life.

Of her ultimate acquiescence, he entertained no doubts whatever.

When Lord Littelbrane had gone, Lady De Fochsey sat for a long while lost in meditation. By this time her mood was no longer so exalted as it had been immediately after Robert Jarrett's departure. The phantasies of her brain were growing dimmer and vaguer.

Already an inward voice whispered uneasily that she had done a foolish thing in refusing Lord Littelbrane.

"What has a woman of your age got to do with love?" the tormentor kept on saying. "Are you not past all that folly?"

The thought made her feel quite hysterical. It was such a cruel, cruel question to emanate from one's own secret consciousness, that it set her off laughing and crying by turns.

The pugs were disturbed in their slumbers, and barked in melancholy chorus.

Thank goodness ! to these dear, discreet confidantes she could confess the tumultuous passions that tore her heart in twain. Throwing herself full length on the hearthrug she embraced them fervently, almost as if they, too, had been mediums, and cried aloud :

“ Oh ! Doodie, Oh ! Snoodie, my sweet darlings ! Pity your poor mistress, for she is most dreadfully in love, and has actually refused a coronet and twelve thousand a year. My pretty ones, what do you say to that ? ”

Doodie and Snoodie curled their tails, blinked their eyes, and licked their black shiny lips as much as to say :

“ We think our ‘ poor mistress ’ has taken leave of her senses altogether ; but it don’t much matter to us, as long as she will retain them sufficiently to keep up a good fire. As for love—it’s all nonsense. Comfort’s the thing to go in for. Food, warmth, drink, then sentiment can be dispensed with.”

Unfortunately Lady De Fochsey was unable to obtain a clear insight into the sagacious minds of Doodie and Snoodie. If she had, she might have seen that materialism there reigned supreme. No gracious spirit-forms of departed pugs affected the serenity of the living.

But their mistress, as she lay with them clasped in her arms, kept on wondering what further delicious manifestations might have taken place if only Lord Littelbrane had not appeared when he did.

Her mind was a disordered chaos, in which worldly and spiritual lovers were grotesquely jumbled up, now one, now the other gaining a short-lived preponderance. Still, she had had so many of the former that on the whole she preferred the latter. A spiritual embrace was not only very exciting, but also delightfully novel. Exhausted sensation took a fresh lease of life when brought into communion with psychological converts. Spirit-wooing was so refined, so chaste, so exquisitely chivalrous.

There was nothing the least prosaic about it—not like Lord Littelbrane’s love-making. His mode of courtship had been laconic and commonplace to a degree.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DIVINITY’S MOTHER.

As Bob walked in the direction of home his thoughts, curiously enough, did not dwell much on the events that had taken place during his visit to Lady De Fochsey. They rebounded from her ladyship to Dot Lankester. It was strange how all the higher longings within him, instead of responding to the advances of his spiritual affinity, were attracted in an entirely different direction. He was disgusted with the part he had more or less been forced

to play, and felt as if he had behaved traitorously towards his real love.

Four whole days had now elapsed since he had seen her. He began to fear she must be ill, and wondered, although the hour was somewhat advanced, whether he could not concoct some excuse for calling at Doctor Lankester's house, and perhaps obtaining a peep of his daughter.

Thus thinking, he quickened his stride, and walked steadily on, until within about half a mile of the village. Then, all of a sudden, as he turned a sharp bend in the road, he saw no less a person than the doctor himself immediately ahead.

This was indeed a piece of good luck, for even if he failed to catch a glimpse of Dot, he was sure to hear some news of her, and learn the reason why, in spite of all his endeavours, they had not met.

He soon overtook his neighbour, who was walking at a leisurely pace, like one enjoying the Sabbath repose, and who expressed his pleasure at their meeting.

"How do you do, Mr. Jarrett?" he said, shaking hands cordially. "I see that, like me, you have been tempted by the beauty of the afternoon to take a constitutional."

"Yes," replied Bob, "I thought a walk would do me good; but I confess to having had an object. I have been calling on Lady De Fochsey. Do you know her by any chance?"

"No, we have never met, except in the hunting field, where I have seen her occasionally, but not often. She is not one of our regular residents."

"Oh! indeed. And when do you hunt again, doctor?" inquired Bob, thinking a good opportunity had presented itself to attack the subject of Dot's accepting a mount.

"I'm not quite sure. It's very difficult for me to form plans beforehand. They are so liable to be upset at the last moment. But if I can possibly manage it I hope to get out on Wednesday."

"Let me see, where do they meet?" said Bob. "My memory is so bad that I have forgotten."

"At Pilkington Hill-side, in the very best part of the whole country. That's why I'm anxious to keep the day clear if I can. We generally have a good run from there. The Pilkington foxes are nearly always a wild, straight-running lot." And Doctor Lankester's mild face lit up with the enthusiasm of a genuine sportsman.

"Does—does Miss Lankester accompany you?" inquired Bob, a trifle confusedly.

"I hope so. She has been away from home the last few days, staying with a friend the other side of the county."

"Oh!" said Bob, trying to appear indifferent. "I thought I had not seen her about."

"That was the reason; but the child comes back on Tuesday,

and I should like to arrange a treat for her if I could. You don't know what an awfully keen sportswoman Dot is, Mr. Jarrett."

"I can quite imagine it, if she takes after her father," said Bob with a smile.

"Well, I suppose these things are hereditary," admitted Doctor Lankester. "At all events, Dot inherits her love of sport from me, for her mother does not know a horse from a cow. However, the child is a true chip of the old block, and it is a pleasure to see her out hunting. She enjoys herself so thoroughly. The only thing is it makes me wish I could afford to mount her decently."

Doctor Lankester had altogether dropped his professional manner, and apparently enjoyed nothing better than talking about his daughter, of whom he was evidently as proud as he was fond.

Now was Bob's chance; he could not possibly have had a better.

"I—I wanted to ask you something," he said, blushing like a schoolgirl.

"Indeed! What is it? If I can be of any assistance to you, I shall be only too glad."

"It's a favour," said Bob, turning a shade more crimson than before.

"I'm delighted to hear it, because, in that case, the probabilities are the request is something I am in a position to grant."

"Thank you, awfully, doctor; I only want you to say yes."

His companion smiled. Bob's simplicity was a refreshing contrast to Captain Straightem's hauteur.

"You forget," he said indulgently, "that I still remain in ignorance as to your wishes."

"Well, the fact is," Bob blurted out in reply, "I have a great many more horses in my stables than I can possibly ride——"

"Then you're a very lucky man," interrupted the doctor playfully.

"Yes, but if you would only allow Do—I mean Miss Lankester, to take one whenever she wants to go hunting, it would be conferring a downright obligation upon me. There, that's what I wanted to say."

Doctor Lankester gave no immediate reply. Coming from an almost total stranger he was touched by the kindness of the offer. In twenty years Captain Straightem had never made a similar one.

"Well, what do you think of my idea?" asked Bob anxiously. "You won't refuse, will you?"

"Upon my word, Mr. Jarrett, I hardly know. It is awfully kind of you to suggest such a thing, but I scarcely feel justified in allowing Dot to profit by your generosity."

"It would be uncommonly nice to give her a real good mount for Wednesday," urged Bob persuasively, "especially if she knew nothing at all about it till she got to the meet."

Dr. Lankester's countenance showed that the proposition was one which recommended itself.

He was devotedly attached to his daughter, and the mere thought of giving her pleasure proved a great inducement to accept Mr. Jarrett's offer.

"I think Dot would go off her head with delight," he said. "*How* she would ride if she were really well mounted. I should like you to see her follow hounds just for once, Mr. Jarrett." And his face beamed with paternal pride.

"I hope to see Miss Lankester follow hounds not once, but many times," Bob rejoined; "and, as I said before, it will be an act of charity to keep my horses in work."

"There are not many ladies in these parts who can beat Dot across a country," went on the doctor, feeling that he had secured a sympathetic listener, and in his innocence never once suspecting Bob might have an ulterior motive. "Although I say it—who shouldn't—she *can* ride. I know no prettier sight in this world than to see Dot coming over a fence."

"She's a pretty sight anywhere," said Bob, under his breath. Then he added aloud, and in tones of perfect satisfaction, "Come, that's settled, and we need not discuss the matter any more. How do you go to covert, doctor?"

"We generally ride, provided the distance is not too great."

"In that case, if you and Miss Lankester will jog out to the meet on Wednesday, Kingfisher shall be there in readiness, and my groom can then change the saddles."

"A thousand thanks. That will suit us capitally, and I do hope, for Dot's sake, we may have a good run, if only to give her a chance of proving herself not wholly unworthy of your kindness."

"Pray don't talk about kindness," said Bob, colouring up to the roots of his hair. "The boot is on the other leg, really."

"Ah! that's your nice way of putting it."

"Not at all. I can't tell you, doctor," and Bob's face grew suddenly grave, "how lonely I am all by myself in that great big house. I long for companionship, and if you and your family would only treat me as a friend, instead of as a stranger, you would be conferring a real benefit."

Doctor Lankester was moved by this appeal. He had conceived a great liking for the simple and straightforward young fellow, and only Bob's superior social position had prevented him from showing it more fully. Now his heart was completely won.

"We shall all appreciate having a neighbour in you," he said heartily. "And if we are to treat you unceremoniously, you must treat us the same, and, whenever you are dull or out of spirits, consider our house your home. And, as a beginning, you had better come in now and drink tea with my wife, who will thoroughly enjoy a chat. For here we are," pulling up before the identical porch beneath which Bob had stood gazing at Dot's pure profile only a few nights previously.

The young man gladly accepted this invitation. He had

nothing whatever to do until dinner-time ; and, in spite of Dot's absence, his curiosity prompted him to take the present opportunity of seeing her home and surroundings. They would surely speak to him of her in some form or other.

He also believed that if he could but succeed in establishing a friendship between himself and Doctor and Mrs. Lankester, it would materially assist his cause hereafter. There was nothing like having the parents on one's side to start with. Their goodwill might prove an enormous gain, and greatly facilitate all future meetings.

Mothers were proverbially kind to eligible young men who appeared to fancy their daughters, and Bob entertained every hope of enlisting Mrs. Lankester's sympathies. A quiet half-hour's confidential conversation would at least afford a chance of making a favourable impression, which he should take care to increase later on.

So he followed the doctor into a small but cheerful and cleanly-papered passage, and shortly afterwards was ushered into the presence of Dot's mother. He had looked upon her with reverence, as a being to be admired and distantly adored, in virtue of her quite too charming daughter. And she disappointed him.

Had he not been so young and so foolish he might have known that such would surely prove the case. For when does a middle-aged woman ever come up to a man's expectations? He can always find a flaw in her somewhere, if so disposed. His imagination had pictured a gentle, fragile, ethereal-looking old lady, with silvery locks, and a white Shetland shawl, and a sweet musical voice. In reality, he saw a stout, rotundly-shaped personage, with black beady eyes, rosy cheeks, and several chins, who spoke in a sharp staccato voice, and who, against his will, impressed him with an idea of vulgarity, and of belonging to a lower class than did her husband.

Mrs. Lankester was clad in a black silk dress, very shiny at the shoulder-blades. Her head was covered by a gorgeous erection of lace and bright blue ribbons, and round her fat red neck hung a long gold watch-chain. The first glimpse proclaimed her fondness for meretricious adornment. At least, so Bob decided. As for any resemblance to Dot—well, when she began to speak, it relieved him to find that there was none. They had not a single trait or feature in common. All the girl's refinement and gentility evidently came from her father. She owed none of her charms to the maternal side.

Mrs. Lankester received him most graciously ; nevertheless, there was something about her which he did not like, though he would have been at a loss to define what that something was. Her exaggerated civility produced an irritating effect upon his nerves, and seemed too great to be real. There was too much fussiness in her manner and in her effusive speeches. He preferred Doctor Lankester's homely method of offering hospitality. But that good man remained singularly quiet in the presence of his better-half, of

whom it was easy to see he stood in considerable awe. He soon left the room, pleading as an excuse that he had some business to attend to, and the lady was not ill-pleased to find herself alone with her guest. The doctor always would prose on so about medicine and science, and things that nobody cared a bit about. She should extract far more from Mr. Jarrett in his absence.

Meanwhile tea had been brought up, and she pretended to be very busy among the cups and saucers.

"Sugar?" she inquired presently, with an ingratiating smile, holding up a lump between the tongs, and thrusting it almost under her visitor's nose.

"If you please, Mrs. Lankester."

"*And cream?*" laying an emphasis on the words, which called attention to the fact of cream and not milk being offered.

"If it is not troubling you too much," said Bob amiably.

"Oh! don't mention the trouble; it's a pleasure."

Seated *vis-à-vis* his hostess and furnished with a cup of boiling tea, which could only be drunk in spasmodic sips, and which was far more painful to the palate than comforting, Bob now, for the first time, summoned up sufficient courage to inquire after Dot.

"And so your daughter is away from home, Mrs. Lankester?" he said.

"Yes, she left early on Wednesday morning. In fact, the day after she and her father dined with you."

"Don't you miss her most dreadfully? I'm sure I should if I had such a child," said Bob, his imagination running riot.

"Oh! yes, of course," responded Mrs. Lankester, in tones which gave the lie direct to the assertion.

"But then, you see, Mr. Jarrett, we poor mothers of families have got to get used to losing our offspring."

"Do you mean that they take husbands unto themselves?"

"Exactly. You've hit the right nail on the head."

"And is Miss Dot going to get married?" he asked with considerable perturbation.

"Now, now, how you do jump at conclusions, to be sure! I never implied such a thing; I merely meant to say that I suppose she will some day, when the right man turns up."

"And hasn't he turned up yet?"

"Not in my opinion. Bits of boys without a halfpenny to bless themselves with are no good whatever, and the mistake is encouraging them, as I have impressed upon Dot since her childhood."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MATERNAL TROUBLES.

BOB gave a sigh of relief at this announcement. He felt as if some deadly weight had been removed from his heart.

"She's sure to marry pretty soon," he said decidedly.

"She may or she may not," answered Mrs. Lankester, looking at him with her sharp black eyes. "I don't mind telling you that my eldest daughter made a very bad match indeed, thanks to her father's weakness in giving his consent; and I've no intention of allowing Dot to do the same, that is to say—" drawing herself up consequentially, "if I have any voice in the matter."

"Quite right," said Bob, highly approving of this decision, since he saw that it shut the doors to numbers of penniless candidates.

"You see, Mr. Jarrett," continued Mrs. Lankester in her most confidential manner, "poor Matilda was simply sacrificed. She fell in love with a young engineer who had only a hundred and fifty a year, and Doctor Lankester, instead of sending him to the right about, actually encouraged the marriage. With what result? There is poor dear Matilda now, at five-and-twenty, living in some frightful, unhealthy African village, from which she may never live to return, and with three little bits of children on her hands. Can you conceive of anything more dreadful or more trying to my maternal feelings?"

"But perhaps she is happy, Mrs. Lankester. If so she would make light of enduring a few hardships for the sake of being with her husband."

"Oh! don't talk to me of her husband. Every time I hear his name mentioned it makes me mad to think what a fool Doctor Lankester was, not to send him off with a flea in his ear. But I shall take pretty good care not to let Dot throw herself away in a similar manner, however much she may be backed up by her father."

And as she spoke Mrs. Lankester's countenance assumed such an obstinate expression that Bob immediately caught himself pitying her more unworldly and tender-hearted spouse, and wondering how many Caudle lectures he had already been treated to on the subject of Matilda's *mésalliance*. But he kept his speculations secret, and said soothingly:

"I think you have no cause for alarm as regards Miss Lankester. She is sure to make a good marriage, possibly a brilliant one. But perhaps you are too ambitious."

"Oh! dear no, Mr. Jarrett. You are quite mistaken there. I would let her marry anybody who had a sufficient income."

"And what do you call a sufficient income, Mrs. Lankester? Fifteen thousand a year?"

That was precisely the amount he had inherited from his uncle.

"Two would satisfy me. But there—" breaking off short, "what's the use of talking? Young men with money and on the look out for a wife are scarce in this part of the world; and even a few hundreds are not to be picked up in a hurry"

"I thought there were any number of hunting bachelors in Stiffshire," said Bob.

"So there are. But they don't count, though lots of them are aggravatingly rich."

"Indeed! Why not?"

"Because their heads are stuffed full of nothing but horses and hounds, and they think far more of a yearling filly than they do of a young lady. I begin to despair of Dot's finding a husband down here." And Mrs. Lankester sighed audibly.

"She must have one, of course?" said Bob, with a touch of satire lost upon his listener, whose extreme worldliness repelled him, although he could not help feeling amused by it.

"Of course. What is a young woman to do if she remains single? She's a perfect nobody, and has no position whatever. Besides, Doctor Lankester can't afford to leave either of his daughters a fortune. He's not at all a rich man, and of late years has been far from strong."

"Never fear," said Bob confidently. "Miss Dot can do quite well without a 'dot'—no joke intended."

"Ah! that's all very fine, but seriously, Mr. Jarrett, what disturbs me so much now-a-days are the tribes of women one meets with wherever one goes. There are a great many more in existence than there are men, and things have got to such a pass in our country, that the fact of the matter is there are not enough husbands to go round. Some of the girls are bound to get left out in the cold, whether they like it or not."

"Then I should ship them off to Australia," said Bob, laughing heartily. "A batch of nice, rosy English young ladies would be immensely appreciated out in the bush."

"One can't send a girl off to a foreign country all alone," said Mrs. Lankester, receiving the suggestion quite seriously. "Besides, Dot is so young yet, that I think she should be allowed to have a chance first, though Heaven only knows how she is ever to meet anybody worth marrying down here."

Mrs. Lankester's anxiety to get rid of her daughter, and the way in which she appealed to him, tickled Bob's fancy not a little. A lady of greater refinement would have concealed her object better, and treated the whole matter more artistically. Instinct told him that in his love's mother he should find a powerful ally, who would advance his cause by every means at her disposal. And, though he might not much like the woman, this was of vast importance. It was an immense relief, too, to ascertain that practically the field lay open, and that none other had laid siege to Dot's affections.

Consequently, the more piteously Mrs. Lankester bewailed the scarcity of eligible suitors, the lighter hearted grew he. Everything appeared satisfactory, as far as he was concerned.

"You mark my words," he said gaily, "some stranger will come pouncing down on Miss Dot when you least expect it, and carry her off before you have time to recover from your surprise."

"I hope so at any rate. But are you really in earnest, Mr. Jarrett?" looking at him with eyes which seemed to pierce his innermost thoughts.

"Yes, quite. Your daughter is much too charming to remain a spinster, even in this country, where there is such a sad insufficiency of the masculine creature."

"And you are not joking?" she said pointedly. "You really mean what you say?"

"Of course I do; I never was more serious in my life."

"Why, Mr. Jarrett," she exclaimed playfully, "I shall begin to think you are a little bit 'gone' on Dot yourself." And an unctuous smile spread slowly over all her roseate countenance.

It was a hazardous speech, but there was a look in his face which emboldened her to make it, and made her heart beat fast with a hope that surpassed even her highest ambition.

He blushed furiously, but did not attempt to deny the insinuation.

Suddenly she leant forward and said with almost motherly solicitude:

"I hope we shall see you very often, Mr. Jarrett, although we have no fine house, or good cook, or old wines to offer as an inducement."

"I don't care two straws about such things," he said hastily.

"No? Well, then, I shall no longer feel afraid to make you heartily welcome whenever you like to come. Even a pot-luck dinner we could manage, if you are not particular."

"There never was any one less so. You seem to forget, Mrs. Lankester, that I was not born in the purple, and have only lately inherited my fortune."

"It's a relief to find you have not inherited Captain Straightem's manners as well as his money," said the lady vindictively. "I can't abide those stuck-up, supercilious people."

"I hope you don't think me 'stuck-up'?" said Bob.

"Not a bit. That's why I like you."

"I am glad your first impressions have been favourable, Mrs. Lankester."

"La! Mr. Jarrett, I feel as if we were quite intimate already, and can almost imagine I had known you all my life. I should no more have dreamt of telling your uncle about Matilda's marriage, and my hopes for Dot, than of flying. But you are what I call a real neighbour, not a make-believe."

"I hope to prove myself one," he said.

"You have done that already; but if you wish to do so still more, you might take compassion on that poor girl of mine, every now and again when you have no better employment. She leads a dull life at best, and a little *young* society would do her all the good in the world."

He understood perfectly what she intended to convey by this petition. Her vulgarity was intense, but fortunately her wishes

coincided with his own, so that he felt no difficulty in complying with the request.

Only he could not help thinking that it was very disgusting of a woman to throw her daughter at a man's head quite so plainly, simply because she knew he was well-off. For of his real character, Mrs. Lankester could know positively nothing. She might have been sacrificing her offspring at the shrine of a monster, for aught she was aware.

Had he been in Dot's place he should have resented such conduct fiercely, and he fancied now that he could divine the reason of her coldness and reserve. No doubt the mother's many lectures on matrimony had revolted her pride, and caused her to assume that sternly defensive demeanour which in his heart of hearts he both admired and respected.

He told himself that he should not have liked her so well if, instead of exhibiting the same simple, child-like nature as her father, she had taken after Mrs. Lankester.

That lady inspired him with an antipathy which he was at a loss wholly to account for. Her amiability struck him as unreal, her good humour as forced.

But he was extremely ungrateful to harbour such thoughts, whilst she sat there, smiling at him across the table and confiding all her maternal troubles, as if he had been her bosom friend, and on terms of the greatest intimacy.

When at length he rose to take his leave, he was conscious that she had somehow contrived to establish a kind of secret understanding, the purport of which was much to this effect:

"You admire my daughter; you can't hide that fact from me, try what you will. Very well. Don't be afraid. The girl has arrived at a marriageable age, and it is high time she was settled in a home of her own, and off my hands. You can make up to her as much as ever you like. I shall take care that you have every opportunity given you."

Bob naturally enough was delighted with his visit, though not perhaps equally so with his future mamma-in-law. He foresaw that the probabilities were he should like her better before than after matrimony, and caught himself wondering how she might be prevented from paying too frequent visits at the Court.

No sooner had he left the room than Mrs. Lankester popped her head out of the door, and called in a sharp, excited voice:

"Doctor Lankester. Come here, I want you!"

"Yes, Emma, what is it?" he inquired, emerging from his laboratory in shirt sleeves and slippers.

"That young man is in love with Dot. You mark my words."

"What young man?" he inquired mildly, having forgotten the very existence of his late visitor.

"What young man? Why! Mr. Jarrett, of course, and I tell you he's awfully spooney already."

"Nonsense, Emma. You women are always taking ridiculous ideas into your heads."

"Oh! indeed! I take ridiculous ideas into my head, do I? I, who am the only one who has a grain of sense in this house. Thank you, Doctor Lankester, thank you."

"Pshaw!" he muttered impatiently, threatening to withdraw. "Can't a poor young fellow even set foot inside our doors without your having designs upon him?" And he commenced a retreat.

"Don't go. I've something to say to you," his better-half exclaimed authoritatively.

"You generally have, my dear," he responded with a sigh of resignation.

"Yes, but this is something very special—something that may affect your daughter's future welfare, and secure her fortunes hereafter."

"Out with it, then. Every woman should make a point of checking all tendency towards verbosity. The sex have a natural inclination to use half-a-dozen words where one would do."

"How rude you are! But about Mr. Jarrett——"

"Well, what of him? Has he been doing or saying anything very startling?"

"You know what a terrible muddle you made in poor Matilda's case——" unheeding the demand.

"That's according to one's individual way of thinking. Matilda may not be rich, but she's very happy, and money is not everything in this world."

"It's a great deal, though. And supposing Matilda's husband were to die to-morrow, where would she be? Should not you have to keep her and the three children?" looking at him contemptuously.

This interrogation was so unanswerable that Doctor Lankester took refuge in silence. He generally said as little as possible when the partner of his bosom began an argument, knowing from bitter experience that otherwise it was apt to prove interminable.

"All I want is this," continued Mrs. Lankester. "You've had your own way with one daughter, and failed signally, let me have mine with Dot."

"I don't understand you. And God knows I don't want to have my own way in anything that is not for the child's good."

"You are very dense. Leave me to manage Mr. Jarrett, and don't attempt to interfere."

"But, Emma——"

"No, let us have no buts. You are not called upon to volunteer confessions, even if there were any to make. All I ask you to do is to hold your tongue."

"I fear there may be some deception," he said, yielding a reluctant consent.

"Deception, indeed! And pray what do you take me for, Doctor

Lankester? That is a pretty word for a man to use to his own wife. It's as good as telling her that she's a downright liar."

"Emma, I do wish you would not use that word. It's unlady-like in the extreme."

"Story-teller, then, though it's too absurd to be so particular, when you have just told me to my face that I am capable of playing all sorts of mean tricks."

"I'm sure I never said anything of the sort," said the poor doctor apologetically.

"You insinuated it, John. Yes, and in the most unkind and brutal fashion. And all because I asked you to maintain a discreet reserve where your own daughter is concerned. It really does not signify to me who Dot marries, not a bit; but don't lay the blame at my door if she ends by being a pauper, and has not even so much as a roof over her head after your death."

And so saying Mrs. Lankester flounced out of the room, leaving her husband in a state of mild bewilderment as to what the discussion really meant, and for what particular reason he was sternly forbidden to allude to certain innocent facts in Mr. Jarrett's presence.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MORBEY ANSTEAD MEET IN THEIR CRACK COUNTRY.

A LARGE and fashionable host assembled at Pilkington Hill-side to greet the Moreby Anstead hounds in their crack country. Every town and village within a radius of twenty miles had apparently poured forth its contingent. Many arrived by train, but more reached the fixture on smart, galloping hacks, whose fore-legs seemed warranted to resist the trying influences of Macadam. About quarter of a mile from the covert was a road where each fresh arrival congregated, and this road was literally crowded with horsemen, grooms, spectators and vehicles of every description, from a smart four-in-hand containing a batch of officers from the neighbouring town of Stiffton, to a diminutive, yellow-painted donkey cart, the owners of which were standing up on the wheels in order to obtain a more elevated point of view.

Huntsmen and hounds were evidently the chief attraction to the natives. Burnett was surrounded by a bevy of meanly-clad, good-natured foot-people, who watched his proceedings, and those of his canine tribe with intensest interest, and uttered remarks amusing from the very ignorance they displayed. Altogether the scene was a brilliant one, rendered gay to the eye by the numbers of scarlet coats and snowy leathers, which offered a pleasing contrast to their background of grey-green grass and neutral-coloured hedge-rows, that stretched far away towards the horizon. A few gleams of sunshine would have rendered it still more imposing,

and given warmth to the surrounding landscape; but the day was dull and still, with a quiet grey sky, and just a bite of frost in the air.

What wind there was came from the east. Though not strong it was cold in quality, and made the horses round their backs and whisk their tails in a manner not wholly agreeable to nervous riders. The Field were in a particularly cheerful and sanguine mood. Even the Mutual Adorationites were a shade less sad than usual, and not *quite* so chary of speech. By a remarkable coincidence, everybody had apparently made up his or her mind that the day was one destined to prove productive of a good run. Even Burnett seemed hopeful, and declared there was every appearance of its being a scenting morning, which statement still further increased the expectations of his followers.

Bob had taken care to arrive early. He sported "pink" for the first time, and felt very fine in his new clothes. Already he wondered at himself for ever having descended to elastic straps. Looking back, even Charles' ill-concealed derision appeared perfectly justifiable. His thoughts, however, were full of Dot, and he was glad not to differ from his neighbours for her sake. He would not have liked her to consider him a guy. He left home quite a quarter of an hour sooner than was necessary, because he did not desire to miss the pleasure of seeing her face when first she became aware of the fact that she was to ride Kingfisher instead of Mouse.

Consequently, he took up his station at the junction of four roads a little way removed from the crowd, whilst his pulses throbbed with feverish expectation. Meantime Kingfisher was safely domiciled in some farm buildings close at hand.

Fortunately for the impatient young man he had not to wait long.

Before many minutes had gone by, he recognized a certain sturdy dun cob, advancing at a brisk trot, and bearing on her back a slender, feminine figure which set his heart a-beating even whilst yet a considerable distance off.

Doctor Lankester accompanied his daughter. He was mounted on a short-legged, compact, flea-bitten grey mare, with a big body, strong quarters, and a lean head and neck, which gave her a real business-like and "varmint" appearance. In fact she looked a hunter all over; and the way she pricked her ears at sight of the hounds, champed at her bit, and quickened her stride, proclaimed a decided preference to chasing the fox rather than jogging soberly along the roads from one patient to another. Her rider appeared transformed. From a quiet, rather melancholy individual, he had changed into a vivacious and enthusiastic sportsman, who sat his horse like a centaur, and whose heart was evidently in the work.

"Hooray! Here you are!" exclaimed Bob, colouring with pleasure, and raising his hat to Dot. "How do you do, Miss

Lankester? Has your father been telling you as you came along of the terrible plans we have hatched in your absence?"

The tone of his voice reassured her.

"No," she said smiling. "What plans?"

The fresh air and the sharp exercise had tinted her face like a wild rose.

"I will leave Doctor Lankester to explain; for if you don't approve of our conspiracy, you will forgive him more readily than me."

She turned towards her father with a look of bewilderment in her clear eyes.

"Papa," she said. "What does Mr. Jarrett mean?"

"Well, Dot," he replied, "the fact is, our kind friend and neighbour has insisted upon your accepting a mount for the day. So jump off old Mouse, my girl, and we will set about changing saddles at once."

A sudden flush of pleasure rushed to her cheeks, and dyed them a vivid crimson. Bob would not have lost the sight of that involuntary expression of delight for a great deal. It sent an answering thrill of rapture running through his veins, and was all the reward he wanted. No words could have conveyed half so much.

And Dot, taken completely by surprise, did not give herself time to think. Besides, if her father had sanctioned the proceedings, it was absurd for her to entertain any scruples. Red letter days were scarce. Surely she would be a fool not to profit by one when she got the chance.

Some such thoughts flashed for a moment through her brain, then she exclaimed cordially:

"A mount for me? Oh! Mr. Jarrett, how good of you. I feel as if it were impossible to thank you enough."

But Bob had vanished. Without waiting to hear what Dot would say he had gone off in search of Kingfisher. He reappeared however, very shortly, accompanied by a groom leading the proud animal destined to carry Miss Lankester.

She jumped lightly to the ground without further delay, and stood holding Mouse's bridle with her small, gloved hands, whilst her saddle was being transferred from the one horse to the other.

A little, slender bit of a thing she looked; not exactly short, but very slight and girlish, and with a wonderful pair of clear, intelligent eyes, through which her whole nature seemed to shine.

So Bob thought as he gazed at her, but Dot's attention was fully engrossed by Kingfisher.

The chestnut was a real beauty, and a thorough gentleman in appearance—long, low, and symmetrical, with a blood-like head, small sensitive ears, and a neck strong, yet pliant as a piece of whalebone. He stood about fifteen three, on good sound limbs, short from the knee downwards, whilst his sloping shoulders denoted speed and comfort to the rider, his great, long muscular thighs and well let down hocks, immense jumping capability. Dot was

quite sufficiently well versed in horse-flesh to take in her hunter's good points. As for Doctor Lankester, who like all Yorkshire men was a heaven-born judge, he stood and looked him over with the eye of a "connoisseur," and even then found it hard to detect a fault.

"That's something like a hunter," he exclaimed approvingly. "Clean bred, yet up to weight, and as nearly perfect in shape, as man could wish for. Dot," turning to his daughter with a pleased expression, "it will be your fault, my girl, if you do not show a good many of us the way to-day."

Dot gave a little, silvery laugh, which rang out musically on the still air.

"I'll do my best at any rate, father. But it takes a very first-rate performer to flourish his heel's in Sugarloaf's face."

"Aye, aye, that's so," said the doctor, playing with his mare's fine mouth. "But all the same, if I'm not very much mistaken, you'll have the legs of me to-day."

When all was in readiness, Bob, after first apologizing for his inexperience, offered to mount the girl, but her father's hands were already clasped, and she put her foot inside them with the confidence of long use. In another second she was firmly seated in the saddle, and gently taking up the reins, leant forwards and patted Kingfisher's glossy neck.

"Nice old man," she said in cooing accents. "You and I must soon make friends."

As she moved off towards where the hounds were located, her slight figure, with its shapely shoulders and small, round waist sitting firm and erect, although it yielded gracefully to every movement of her horse, Bob thought, that in spite of the patched habit, and its threadbare seams, which again had attracted his notice, he had never seen a much prettier sight in his life. She was so trim and neat, and her sweet little face peeped out from under the brim of her pot hat like some bright, fresh, wholesome flower, that held its head up straight, and knew none of the sin and misery that goes on in this vale of tears.

He gave a few final directions to his groom about taking Mouse back to her own stables, and was just about to follow Doctor Lankester and his daughter, when a voice close behind said unceremoniously:

"Hulloa! Bob. How are you?"

Startled by the familiarity of the greeting, he looked round and perceived Lady De Fochsey, who in her scarlet coat and white waistcoat, reminded him somewhat of a monkey on a barrel-organ.

"Good morning," he responded politely, trying to smother a slight feeling of annoyance at her presence, and the off-hand mode of address, which distinctly intimated that she looked upon him as her own peculiar property. "Nice day this, for hunting."

"Yes, very, though I shouldn't wonder if it rained later on. By

the way, would you mind piloting me? I always like knowing I have some one to rely upon, and really, Captain Springerton has taken to jumping such tremendous places, that I told him only the last time he was out, it was really impossible for me to follow him any longer."

This request placed Bob in a dilemma. He had never bargained for having to take charge of her ladyship in the field, and was rather alarmed by the proposition. To begin with, he had not the very faintest notion whether she went well to hounds or not; and moreover, on this particular day, he had promised himself the pleasure of keeping near Dot Lankester, and of seeing how Kingfisher carried his precious burden. Instinct told him, that if he acceded to his spiritual affinity's demand, it would seriously interfere with this programme. She was not a lady to brook any rival.

"Upon my word," he answered diplomatically, "I should be only too glad to assist you in any difficulty, but I am not an experienced sportsman, and really don't pretend to know enough about hunting to undertake the delicate task of piloting a lady across country."

"Oh! never mind that, Bob, you're too modest by half. Besides, there's no occasion to go so desperately hard. Indeed I'd rather not as far as I am concerned. These tremendous big fences only scratch your face, and pull all your clothes to pieces."

"It don't much signify about my face being scratched," he rejoined ungraciously, "though of course a lady's is different. Only if hounds run, one is bound to try and be with them."

"Oh! if one turns up at the checks it does just as well. For my part, I prefer sticking to the roads—they give you such much better opportunities."

He made a wry face, but had not courage enough to ask, to what sort of opportunities she referred, though in his own mind he summed them up by a single word—flirtation.

"I give you fair warning," he said, striving to conceal his impatience at being separated from Dot, "that I am not a fit person to pilot a lady."

"But, Bob—I want to talk to you. I *must* talk to you, in fact."

"What about, Lady De Fochsey? Can't you say what you've got to say now?"

"Impossible! How can you ask such a question, especially after all that happened the other day? Is there no more magnetic sympathy between us? Has it entirely evaporated?"

"I'm sure I don't know," he responded sheepishly. "I never exactly understood what magnetic sympathy meant."

"You seemed to have a pretty good inkling of it last Sunday afternoon at any rate, but it appears to me that you have retrogressed since then."

"Yes, I am afraid I have. I am not conscious of much improvement."

"Have you made no progress whatever, Bob?"

"It seems not. At least according to your way of thinking."

"Alas! Neither have I, and it proves to me conclusively, that the latent possibilities within us cannot be developed singly, but require mutual assistance. We must repeat our experiments, and lose no time in doing so, else what powers we already possess will fade away, owing to the weakening of the electric current. Tell me, Bob," sidling up close to him, "when may I expect you? I shall take care this time, that our *séance* is not interrupted, just when we are obtaining important results."

He felt more and more embarrassed. Her eagerness was difficult to deal with.

"Really," he said, in shuffling tones that were most unusual to him, and wishing to goodness he had the moral courage to put an end to this tomfoolery once and for all, "it's almost impossible to fix any exact time."

"Are you so very, very busy?" she asked sarcastically.

He reddened. The tone of her voice brought home an uncomfortable sense of evasion.

"Well, yes, I am. The fact is, Lady De Fochsey," setting his jaw as if he were going at some impenetrable bull-finch, "I can't cultivate my 'latent possibilities' until my terrestrial affairs have been placed in some order."

"But why not combine the two? The development of your psychic force would enable you to attend to mere mundane business with far greater ability."

"I fear that it cannot be done. I am not so sanguine as you."

She turned a pair of reproachful blue eyes full upon him.

"Oh, Bob," dropping her voice almost to a whisper, "you are dreadfully unkind. I could not have believed that you would have treated me like this."

"Like what?" The rose, whose fragrance he had not been strong enough to withstand, was beginning to show thorns.

"You seem to ignore my sufferings altogether."

"We will hope that they are not very terrible," he said, trying to banter her out of her sentimental mood.

"But they are; and oh! Bob, we should not have needed many more *séances*. Half-a-dozen or so would soon have rendered us independent of hand-joining. It is only the preliminary stages that are perhaps a little tedious, and when people are born mediums like yourself, they have certain obligations towards their fellow-creatures which it is downright wicked to ignore."

And she looked at him tearfully, for she had not foreseen this refractory spirit.

The distressed expression of her countenance produced the intended effect. Bob relented somewhat.

"Well, well," he said temporizingly, "there's time enough yet. We will wait till a frost comes, and then see what can be done in the way of spiritual and magnetic improvement."

She was going to make some reply, but at this precise moment, Lord Littelbrane, not seeing Bob, rode up to her side, and the young man profited by the opportunity to effect an immediate escape. He at once cantered off in pursuit of the Lankesters, who had joined the hounds.

Two minutes afterwards his lordship gave the signal for the proceedings of the day to commence, and, accompanied by a whole crowd of foot-people, Burnett moved off at the head of a huge procession, and trotted briskly across half-a-dozen grass fields which separated the covert from the road.

Kingfisher had not been out hunting since his late accident, and consequently was very fresh. When the good horse saw his old friends, the little, beautiful white and tan ladies in front of him, and felt the soft, elastic turf under his hoofs, he whinnied with delight, and in the exuberance of his spirits, bounded high into the air.

"You are not frightened, are you?" said Bob, a little anxiously to Dot Lankester.

Her whole face was aglow with pleasure.

"Frightened? Oh! dear no. I like it. You've no idea, Mr. Jarrett, what an exhilarating sensation it is to feel a good hunter under one when you've only been accustomed to inferior animals. I don't think I ever was on such a horse," caressing Kingfisher's silky mane, an action which provoked another playful buck and a little ringing laugh from Dot.

"I never thought he'd play the fool like this," said Bob resentfully.

"He's only light-hearted, Mr. Jarrett, and so am I," she called out gaily in reply.

Seeing her so cool and undisturbed both in seat and in nerve, Bob began to feel reassured, especially as Doctor Lankester made as light of Kingfisher's vagaries as did his daughter, and evidently entertained no fears on her behalf.

So Bob concluded that his alarm was groundless. Nevertheless he stuck to Dot's side until the covert was reached and a general halt proclaimed. Having mounted the girl he persuaded himself easily enough into the belief that it was more or less his duty to look after her.

(To be continued.)

SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

THE private views at picture galleries during this season have been more numerous and more brilliantly attended than those of any previous spring. These functions enjoy an increasing popularity, at which no one can wonder, for they bring together representatives of all the worlds; both of those that *s'ennuyent* and those that *s'occupent*. Society proper may be reckoned among the former; and at the largest gathering of the kind, that at the New Gallery, or, to quote the happy name given it by a witty person, Halicarnassus, half the peerage seems to have been present. Regent Street was blocked with carriages, and titles were, so to speak, in the atmosphere of the place. The New Gallery is evidently to be the fashion, for this season certainly, and probably for many others to come. Those present had donned the freshest and fairest of their spring costumes. Speech was epigrammatic, as suited a brilliant occasion, and even the dullest sought in the recesses of their brain for an adjective wherewith to fit out their idea of Mr. Burne-Jones' remarkable pictures. On the whole, we may take this private view as summing up and containing in itself all the others, since "everybody" was there, and the gathering was even more comprehensively inclusive than that at the Royal Academy itself. The large square marble-floored vestibule, with a lively little fountain in the centre and a fringe of flowering plants all round, formed a capital vantage ground for those who wished to see the arrivals. In default of distinctive labels to be worn by interesting people, it is to be wished that all visitors on such occasions could be announced by name, as they are at the *soirée* of the Royal Academy. About half-past three o'clock the stream of fresh arrivals was thick and continuous. Artist, author, painter, sculptor, duke, earl, celebrated beauty, politician, singer, actress, dramatist, writer, composer, physician and poet, all followed each other in rapid succession. To attempt to enumerate them would result in an incomplete and not very interesting catalogue; but to select a few among so many may not be invidious. Conspicuous by reason of her magnificent height and striking appearance was Lady Colin Campbell, in a well-made dress of striped blue and white silk, with Pompadour flowerets scattered

over it—a gown that few women would dare to wear—accompanied by an equally venturous hat in red straw shot with blue, and trimmed with ribbons that climbed to a remarkable altitude. This lady was the most striking figure in the room. Mrs. Whitehorne in black looked much handsomer than she had done in red and blue at some previous private views. Miss Fortescue's charming face and refined style was also well set forth by a dainty dress of black lace and hat to match, with yellow field flowers for trimming; the brim was caught straight up at the back, and it was well, for this pretty lady's hair is too lovely to be concealed. Mr. Sala, with his fair secretary, roamed through the rooms in a critical frame of mind, tempered with a salutary geniality. Mrs. Labouchere, all in soft grey, humorously commented upon pictures and people. Mrs. Jopling wore a very becoming gown of black silk strewn with long white chrysanthemum petals, and a smart little bonnet to match. The Girton girl, who deals in bonnets but loves political economy, preferring brains to what covers them, was in harmonious black and grey, which fell about her tall figure in softly undulating lines. Her bonnet was a spring epic. Some others were less happy in their attire, but they may pass unnoted, for there was an embarrassment of riches in the shape of well-thought-out costumes. A girl in grey looked cool and smart. Another in mignonette green was a pleasant vision. A third, in a gown of cream-coloured flannel, worn under a redingote of striped beige in two deeper shades, suggested Paris. The bead-trimmed people looked hot. The tight-waisted people seemed almost to simmer. Those who had tied up their faces in thick veils almost boiled. The splash of the fountain was a pleasant sound in the torrid atmosphere. Mrs. Oscar Wilde, in yellowish green, looked charming. Two beautiful girls, evidently sisters, and both rejoicing in a glory of bright hair, wore white dresses with black hats and were the centre of many admiring looks. Green was the colour most generally worn. Grey came next in popular favour, and shades of fawn and brick ran the other two a good third.

The first night of "Bootles' Baby," at the Globe Theatre, was a very interesting occasion to those who appreciated the charming books written by "John Strange Winter," a *nom-de-guerre* which now but thinly veils the identity of Mrs. Arthur Stannard, one of the most popular women in London literary circles. Her friends assembled with much eager interest in the success of the dramatic version of the book which brought her name and fame after many years of assiduous and untiring work. There was much curiosity to see in the flesh the sweet *Mignon* and the tender-hearted *Bootles*, and the sensitive in the audience feared some disillusionment. The dramatist might have done his work better. He has forgotten that action is the heart and soul of a play, just as smart dialogue is its flesh and blood. In the first two acts

there is scarcely any dramatic action, and much of the dialogue is commonplace and even tedious. The scenes in which Mr. Charles Collette appears saved the first act from impressing itself upon the audience as decidedly dull. In the second the appearance of little Minnie Terry as *Mignon* was hailed with something approaching rapture. General relief was felt that the little girl realized in some measure our ideal of the delightful *Mignon* of the book.

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pronounced satisfactory, and *Lucy* would better if he had always remembered to strongly recalls Mr. Kendal in voice, As *Gilchrist*, the villain whose villainy expressed, in the book, Mr. Sugden to play. The dramatist had laid on y, forgetting that there never yet was l, and committing the inartistic fault sible that any nice woman could love him. *Miss Grace* says she loves him, but none of us believed her. Mr. Moss' villain is much too black. He ought at once to be pounced out and lightened by several shades. The dramatist should always bear in mind that

Il y a des objets que l'art judicieux,
Doit offrir à l'esprit mais reculer des yeux.

The artificiality of Miss Edith Woodworth's manner is much to be regretted, for she had gleams of inspiration that did not fail to make their mark. *Miss Grace*, in the book, is a sensible woman. In the play she is rather a goose, weak and lachrymose. And yet a touch or two would set all right. The uniforms of the officers, with the glimpses of barrack life, were much appreciated by the audience. Mr. Forbes Dawson must carefully cherish that laugh of his. It is invaluable, and will often act invitingly upon the mirth of an audience. Each act was received with immense enthusiasm, and, faulty as the play is, a good run may be expected for it, partly owing to the great popularity of the book, partly to the popular love for and curiosity about soldiers' lives, and greatly to the unconscious charm of the little child actress, Miss Minnie Terry, who speaks with inimitable archness the lines intrusted to her, and looks almost incredibly sympathetic when she sees her *Bootles* in trouble. That the little girl inherits the dramatic gift of her clever family there can be no doubt. She is a daughter of Miss Ellen Terry's brother, and is about six years old. Many among the audience must have been surprised when "John Strange Winter," in the person of a handsome young matron, with beautiful dark eyes and a very sweet smile, bowed her acknowledgments from a private box, in response to repeated calls.